Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/theworksjames10jame

MR. JAMES'S RECENT FICTIONS.

HEIDELBERG: a Romance. By G. P. R. James, Esq. Three vols. post 8vo, price 1*l.* 11*s.* 6*d.* (*Just Published.*)

THE STEP-MOTHER. In 3 vols. post 8vo, price 1*l.* 11*s.* 6*d.*

ARRAH NEIL; OR, TIMES OF OLD. Three vols. post 8vo, price 1*l.* 11*s.* 6*d.*

THE SMUGGLER: a Novel. Three vols., price 1*l.* 11*s.* 6*d.*

☞ *The Eleventh Volume of the New and Illustrated Edition of*

THE WORKS OF G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.

Will be published on the 1st of January, 1847.

This new and attractive Series of Mr. James's Works is published Quarterly It commenced on the 1st of July, 1844, and the following Volumes have already appeared:—

Vol. I.	containing	THE GIPSY	July 1st, 1844.
Vol. II.	—	MARY OF BURGUNDY .	Oct. 1st, 1844.
Vol. III.	—	THE HUGUENOT . . .	Jan. 1st, 1845.
Vol. IV.	—	ONE IN A THOUSAND .	April 1st, 1845.
Vol. V.	—	PHILIP AUGUSTUS . .	July 1st, 1845
Vol. VI.	—	HENRY OF GUISE . .	Oct. 1st, 1845.
Vol. VII.	—	MORLEY ERNSTEIN . .	Jan. 1st, 1846.
Vol. VIII.	—	THE ROBBER	April 1st, 1846.
Vol. IX.	—	DARNLEY	July 1st, 1846.

*** The Third Volume, in addition to the usual Illustration, contains a new and highly-finished Portrait of the Author.

The following are extracts from a few of the favourable Reviews which have appeared of this Series:—

Times.

"Messrs. Smith, Elder and Co., of Cornhill, have just published the first volume of a New Edition of the Works of this gentleman, which has the advantage of the latest revisions and corrections of the author. The writings of James are so well known to the readers of fiction, that it is unnecessary to call their attention to them, or to say anything which previous criticism may have left unsaid. The present edition is well got up, the type is clear, sharp, and legible, and the size of the volume convenient for the reader, and appropriate for the shelves of a bookcase. The book, as it is, will form a pleasing addition to the collections of readers of modern literature, of the class to which it belongs."

Literary Gazette.

"We are glad to see our prognostication respecting the New Edition of Mr. James's Works more than fulfilled by the rapid absorption of a very large first edition, and a second in the course of speedy disappearance. This is as it should be with a writer whose vraisemblance is always so perfect; and even what he invents so like truth, that we can never fancy we are reading fiction, nor indeed are we, in the historical portions of his publications,—and these form the far greater division,—which are all drawn from diligent research, deep study, and elaborate comparison."

Scotsman.

"Mr. James is a pure and pleasing writer, and we are glad to see that his Works are now to be thrown into a handy, handsome, and accessible shape."

Atlas.

"This is a most admirable edition of the Works of this popular author, convenient in size, and handsome in appearance. It, moreover, possesses the advantage of being revised and corrected by the author,—no small recommendations, since the generality of Mr. James's Works being connected with history, a careful perusal of his productions increases their value, and renders them a source of amusement, through the medium of instruction."

Plymouth Herald.

"We are glad to perceive that such volumes are being published at a price which will place them within the reach of the middle classes, and we shall find, as the result of this movement, that tradesmen and others will furnish their book-shelves with good and select works, instead of subscribing to circulating libraries. We learn it is the publishers' intention to continue the volumes until all the author's works are republished in this style."

LONDON: SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.

DUBLIN: CUMMING & FERGUSON. EDINBURGH: BELL & BRADFUTE.

WORKS JUST PUBLISHED
BY
SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.

I.

WIT AND HUMOUR.

By LEIGH HUNT. Uniform with "Imagination and Fancy," by the same author. In one vol., handsomely bound in cloth, gilt, price 10s. 6d.; or in boards, 9s. (Just ready.)

II.

IMAGINATION AND FANCY:

OR,

SELECTIONS from the ENGLISH POETS, illustrative of those First Requisites of their Art, with markings of the best Passages, Critical Notices of the Writers, and an Essay in Answer to the Question, "What is Poetry?" By LEIGH HUNT. Third Edition. In post 8vo, price 10s. 6d., handsomely bound in a new kind of cloth, gilt; or 9s. boards.

III.

THE OXFORD GRADUATE ON PAINTING.

THE FIRST VOLUME OF

MODERN PAINTERS.

By a GRADUATE OF OXFORD. A New Edition, revised by the Author, and printed uniformly with Volume II. Imperial 8vo, price 18s. cloth.

The SECOND VOLUME OF MODERN PAINTERS: treating of the Imaginative and Theoretic Faculties. Imperial 8vo, price 10s. 6d. cloth.

IV.

SAVAGE LIFE AND SCENES IN AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND.

Being an Artist's impressions of Countries and People at the Antipodes. By GEORGE FRENCH ANGAS, Esq. In 2 vols., post 8vo, with numerous illustrations. (Nearly ready.)

V.

THE INDIAN MEAL BOOK:

A Collection of the best American Receipts for the preparation of Maize or Indian Corn. By MISS LESLIE, of Philadelphia, author of "American Domestic Cookery." Foolscap, sewed in cover, price 1s. 6d.

VI.

TALES OF THE COLONIES:

OR,

THE ADVENTURES OF AN EMIGRANT. By CHARLES ROWCROFT, Esq., a late Colonial Magistrate. The Fourth Edition. [This Work was originally published in three vols. post 8vo, at 1*l.* 11s. 6d., in which size two large editions have been sold.] In foolscap 8vo, price 6s. cloth.

VII.

SECOND SERIES OF TALES OF THE COLONIES.

THE BUSHRANGER OF VAN DIEMEN'S LAND.

By C. ROWCROFT, Esq., Author of "Tales of the Colonies." In three vols., post 8vo, price 1*l.* 11s. 6d.

VIII.

LLEWELYN'S HEIR:

OR,

NORTH WALES, its Manners, Customs, and Superstitions during the last Century. Illustrated by a Story founded on Facts. In three vols., post 8vo, price 1*l.* 11s. 6d.

IX.

THE NOVITIATE:

OR,

A YEAR AMONG THE ENGLISH JESUITS: a Personal Narrative. With an Essay on the Constitutions, the Confessional Morality, and History of the Jesuits. By ANDREW STEINMETZ. In one vol., post 8vo, price 10s. 6d., bound in cloth.

X.

A VISIT TO THE ANTIPODES,

With some REMINISCENCES OF A SOJOURN IN AUSTRALIA. By a SQUATTER. In one vol., foolscap 8vo, with Illustrations, price 5s. cloth.

THE BRIGAND

[illegible] F. Boyle

HERE IS THE KING'S [illegible] ENTER WHATSOEVER CONVENT YOU [illegible] GIVE YOUR HAND [illegible] HIDE [illegible]

THE WORKS

OF

G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.

REVISED AND CORRECTED BY THE AUTHOR.

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY PREFACE.

"D'autres auteurs l'ont encore plus avili, (le roman,) en y mêlant les tableaux dégoutant du vice; et tandis que le premier avantage des fictions est de rassembler autour de l'homme tout ce qui, dans la nature, peut lui servir de leçon ou de modèle, on a imaginé qu'on tirerait une utilité quelconque des peintures odieuses de mauvaises mœurs; comme si elles pouvaient jamais laisser le cœur qui les repousse, dans une situation aussi pure que le cœur qui les aurait toujours ignorées. Mais un roman tel qu'on peut le concevoir, tel que nous en avons quelques modèles, est une des plus belles productions de l'esprit humain, une des plus influentes sur la morale des individus, qui doit former ensuite les mœurs publiques."—MADAME DE STAEL. *Essai sur les Fictions.*

"Poca favilla gran fiamma seconda:
Forse diretro a me, con miglior voci
Si pregherà, perchè Cirra risponda."
DANTE. *Paradiso*, Canto I.

VOL. X.

THE BRIGAND.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.
MDCCCXLVI.

THE BRIGAND:

OR,

CORSE DE LEON.

A Romance.

BY

G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.
MDCCCXLVI.

PR
4821
.J4
1844
v.10

TO

HIS MAJESTY

LEOPOLD I.

KING OF THE BELGIANS.

SIRE,

YOUR Majesty's condescension and kindness towards me might well draw forth some tribute of gratitude; but in dedicating this work to you, there are other feelings that mingle with and exalt personal respect. In the first place, I cannot but remember that the early years of my own illustrious and beloved sovereign owe much to your fostering care, and the pride which every Englishman feels in his Queen naturally inspires veneration for one who, besides being connected with her by many near ties, has ever displayed towards her the affection of a second Father.

During the last fifteen or sixteen years, I have passed through Belgium very frequently, pausing at different places and marking with an eye habitually observant the changes that have been wrought in that period. During the last ten years, while your Majesty has filled that throne to which you were called by the voice of a people now happy in your rule, the most immense and extraordinary progress is observable in the condition of the country that you govern. Were I to say that the whole of the benefits which have been wrought, and the whole of the improvements which have

157157

taken place, are attributable to your Majesty individually, I should be wronging several wise and good men, your counsellors; and offering to you adulation which your clear and discriminating mind would be the first to reject: for not only has a part been effected by ministers and statesmen, but the very feeling of separate nationality, which the people of Belgium experience since your accession, has prompted great endeavours and produced remarkable results. Nevertheless, your Majesty's own wisdom and foresight have originated much, and you have also had a high share in the general improvements which have been carried on by others. You have protected, supported, and directed every great effort and every good design: you have encouraged reasonable enterprise, and rewarded honest endeavour wherever it was to be found: you have fostered and confirmed that nationality from which such benefits must accrue to your people: you have triumphed, by generosity, over the opposition of those who were once attached to another dynasty; and have won to you those who were formerly inimical to your rule.

It would occupy too much space to dwell upon all those matters in which your Majesty's own mind is perceptible; but when I see all that you have done to honour genius, to encourage literature and the arts both in your own and other countries; when I look to the admirable arrangement and preservation of the archives of your realm, and the efforts made to obtain every document which has escaped the destructive power of time and political convulsions, I may well feel, as a literary man and an historian, not only admiration but gratitude. Nor when I find the same continuous efforts, made under various ministries, to ascertain the causes and diminish the amount of crime, to mitigate punishment while vice is repressed, and to lead to virtue by enlightening and instructing the people, can I help feeling veneration, as a lover of my fellow-creatures, for him who has so steadily pursued such a great and noble object.

On the beneficent influence which your Majesty may have exerted by your wise and prudent counsels upon the fate and policy of other states, it does not become me to touch. It is sufficient that, wherever I turn my eyes in your own dominions, I see the most enlightened efforts to promote commerce and the arts, the great sources of national prosperity and national glory, and to foster industry and virtue, the only sure grounds of national happiness. Many men may combine to carry such designs into execution; but they cannot exist in a country where they are not powerfully directed by the sovereign himself.

On the pages which are to follow this dedication I shall say but little. At first sight, the offering of a mere romance may seem but an inappropriate tribute, and I am well aware that anything I can write must be totally unworthy of your Majesty's acceptance; but, at the same time, a romance, if directed to those high purposes which I conceive to form its legitimate object, has a nobler end than mere amusement in view.

I believe that, while the mind is interested and the feelings excited, great lessons may be taught, great morals pointed out, great principles inculcated, far better than in the colder and more apathetic moments of mere study; and, besides the views abstractedly put forth, romance, like history, teaches by example, and applies its doctrines to the human heart by showing the natural result of human actions. It thus may rise to the highest dignity that any work of man can attain; for there is no range of poetical thought that it may not embrace, and no mighty object which it may not promote. However feeble may be my execution of the task, the end I have still proposed to myself in writing has been to elevate the mind of the reader, to offer him a high rather than a grovelling philosophy, and at once to expand and purify his heart. Such views I know your Majesty will fully appreciate, while your generous nature will pardon the defective manner in which they may be carried out.

Allow me to add, upon the subject of the story itself, that the main incident upon which the whole turns is, unfortunately, a recorded fact, and that it, as well as most of the minor particulars, may be found in Auvigny's Life of the Maréchal de Brissac and in the Memoirs of the Maréchal de Vieilleville.

That God may long preserve your Majesty's days, and bless you with health, success, and every sort of earthly happiness, is, I know, the unfeigned prayer of all your own subjects, and in that prayer none more sincerely joins than,

SIRE,

Your Majesty's most humble

and most devoted Servant,

G. P. R. JAMES.

THE BRIGAND:

OR,

CORSE DE LEON.

CHAPTER I.

THERE are a thousand small and apparently accidental circumstances, which, in our course through life, bring a temporary gloom upon us, render our expectations from the future fearful and cheerless, and diminish our confidence in all those things whereon man either rashly relies or builds his reasonable trusts. Strength, youth, wealth, power, the consciousness of rectitude, the providence of God: all these will occasionally lose their sustaining influence, even upon the most hopeful mind, from causes too slight to justify such an effect.

These accidental circumstances, these mental clouds, resemble much those other clouds which sometimes at the close of a bright day come over a landscape previously warm and shining, cast a grey shade over its rich hues, shut out the redoubled glory of the setting sun, and make gloom and shadow spread over the summer scene. Though nothing is changed but the light in which things dwell, though the colour of the tree and the form of the rock are the same, yet the brightness of the whole is departed, and the lustre gone out as if for ever.

There are times, however, when a gloom, which seems to have no counterpart in the physical world, comes over the mind; when all has gone fairly with us; when every object around is full of brightness and hope; when the horses of Fortune's car have never once even stumbled on the way; and not a sorrow rough enough to rub the down from the wing of a butterfly has fallen upon our hearts for years; and yet a deep and shadowy despondency steals over our

spirits, as if the immortal within us were telling the mortal of anxieties and griefs, and dangers approaching — discovered by the fine sympathies of the higher part of our being with things undiscoverable by the mere material creature.

Cares, sorrows, and perils, corporeal agony, and anguish of the heart, are often but as the fire which tempers the pure iron into the fine steel, at once proving and strengthening the spirit. The last grand lesson which leads generous youth to vigorous manhood, which confirms our powers, and gives the great man's mastery over Fate, is to endure; and I am inclined to believe that such sudden and unaccountable feelings of despondency — I do not mean the ordinary fits of gloom that haunt a moody and a wayward spirit, but, on the contrary, the dark impression, the heavy shadow that once or twice, in the midst of a bright lifetime, comes irresistibly upon a gay or placid mind — I am inclined to think, I say, that such despondency is only given to the high-minded and the great — a prophetic voice, announcing not to the ear, but to the heart, that the day of trial comes — the trumpet of Fate calling on a champion, dauntless and strong, to rouse him to the battle, and arm his spirit for some awful strife.

The day had been as bright and beautiful as a summer day in the south of Europe can be; and yet it had spared the traveller and the labourer many of the inconveniences and discomforts which those beautiful days of the south sometimes bring along with them: for the year was yet young, and with all the brightness of youth it had all the tenderness too. There had been a fresh breeze in the sky during the hotter part of the day; and one would have felt that it blew from the cool tops of snowy mountains, even had one not seen from time to time some of the distant peaks of the high Alps towering white over the greener hills below.

There was also a world of streams and rivulets, and cascades about, which gave additional freshness and life to the air that blew heavy with the perfume of the flowers upon the banks; and the high swelling of the mountains round, still gave a pleasant shade to one side of the valley. Each sense had something to delight it; and there was over every object which nature presented, that aspect of peaceful enjoyment which is the greatest soother of man's heart.

The spot was in the extreme verge of Savoy, bordering upon France. It would little benefit the reader to say exactly where, for the aspect of the land has changed: the towns of that age and their laborious denizens would not be recognised by their successors of the present day; the castle,

the fortress, and the palace are ruined and swept away, and even the roads themselves now wind through other valleys or climb over other hills. It was somewhere between Nice and St. Jean de Maurienne: that space is surely limited enough to afford the reader a definite idea of the scene. Let him take a map and a pair of compasses, he will find it but a span; and in reality it is less—with a universe around it.

Nevertheless it was a very lovely scene, as I have said, with the hills tall and blue, and the snowy mountains looking down upon one through the long defiles; with the valleys green and fresh, and the streams bright and sparkling. Here and there, too, upon some rocky height which commanded the entrance of the gorges of the mountain, a feudal castle would raise its battlements, grey, and stern, and warlike; and either in the open plain—where such a thing was found,—or in the warm valleys in the hills, were seen the villages and small towns of Savoy, with their greyish white walls, and their graceful church towers crowning the loveliness of the whole with the aspect of human life. The period of the world's history whereof I speak was one of gorgeous pageantry, and gay wit and deeds of arms—a period when chivalry and the feudal system, just about to be extinguished for ever, blazed with a dying flame. Montmorency still lived, though Bayard and Francis had left the busy scene but a few years before, and Henry the Second had not yet closed his career in the last tournament which Europe was destined to witness. The songs of Marot and the wit of Rabelais still rang in the ear, and Ronsard, Dorat, and Montaigne were entering gaily upon the path of letters.

It was in the year 1558, then, and towards the close of the day, that a small party of horsemen wound along through the bright scenery of which we have spoken. It consisted only of four persons, two of whom were merely armed servants, such as usually attended upon a cavalier of those times, not exactly acting the part of soldier on ordinary occasions, but very well fitted so to do when any particular exigency required the exertion of the strong hand. The third was a youth of no very remarkable appearance, in the garb of a page; but the fourth was evidently the leader of the whole, and, as such, the person who merits the most accurate description. I will attempt to paint him to the eye of the reader, as I have myself seen him represented by the hand of an unknown artist in one of the palaces on the banks of the Brenta.

He was in person about the middle height, rather above it than below, and at this period was not more than twenty-three years of age. His forehead was broad and fine, with

short dark hair curling round it: his features were small, except the eye and brow, the former of which was large and full, and the latter strongly marked. The mouth was very handsome, showing when half open in speaking, the brilliant white teeth, and giving to the whole countenance a look of playful gaiety; but when shut, there was an expression of much thoughtfulness, approaching perhaps to sternness, about it, which the rounded and somewhat prominent chin confirmed. The upper lip was very short; but, on either side, divided in the middle, was a short black mustache, not overhanging the mouth, but raised above it; and the beard, which was short and black like the hair, was only suffered to grow in such a manner as to ornament, but not encumber, the chin.

In form, the cavalier was muscular, and powerfully made, his breadth of chest and shoulders giving the appearance of a more advanced period of life than that at which he had yet arrived. He was evidently a soldier, for he was fully armed, as if having lately been or being still in scenes of strife and danger; and, to say the truth, a man fully armed in those days was certainly more loaded with weapons, offensive and defensive, than was probably ever the case before or since.

The picture I have spoken of represents him, with not only the complete armour which was then still used to encase the person, with the long heavy sword, the dagger, and the large pistols, but also with four short carbines — at least such they appear to be — one at each corner of the saddle. His head, indeed, is seen unencumbered by the steel cap, which usually completed the armour, but which is borne by the page at his saddle-bow, while the cavalier himself appears wearing upon his head the somewhat cooler covering of a black velvet cap, without feather or any other ornament.

The horse that carried him, which was a tall, powerful charger, fared better in some respects than his master, for before this epoch the heavy armour with which steed as well as man used at one time to be encumbered was lightened in favour of the quadruped; and the horse which bore the young gentleman of whom we speak was only covered with such pieces as might protect his head and chest in the shock of the charge.

The day, I have said, had been bright and sweet, and all nature had been as fresh and happy as a young heart upon a holyday. Similar, too, had been the mood of Bernard de Rohan as he rode along; not so much that the scene and its charms created, as that they found sympathetic feelings

in his bosom; for his disposition was naturally cheerful and bright, full of gay thoughts and happy enthusiasms. He was returning, too, from another country, from the midst of strangers, and perils, and fatigues, to enjoy an interval of tranquillity, in his own bright land, and the society of those he loved.

France was within his sight, the tongues that he heard around him spoke nearly the same language as that which he had used from infancy; and though the nominal frontier of Savoy lay some fifteen miles before him, yet, in all but the name, he was in his own country. There was little of that cold restraint about him which is either acquired by harsh dealings with evil men, or is natural from some inward pravity of the heart; and the cheerful mood of his mind found its way forth in many an outward sign. From time to time, he had turned round to speak to the page, or to one of the servants, with some light jest or gay inquiry. Now he would point out a distant spot in the landscape as they stood upon some beetling point half way up the mountain, and ask if they recognised this or that town in Dauphiné; now he would pat the proud crest of his stout horse, and talk to the noble animal as if he expected an answer; and now would even break forth into a snatch of song. His heart, in short, was as a fountain, so filled with happiness that it welled over, and the waters sparkled as they overflowed the brim.

The servants smiled to see their lord so gay, especially an elder one, who, commenting with the other, remarked that he might well look happy, bearing back home such glory as he had won.

Thus passed the earlier part of the day's journey; but towards the evening the mood of Bernard de Rohan changed. His open brow did not grow cloudy, it is true, but there came a look of gloom upon it; the lips no longer opened with a bland smile, and the teeth were shut together with that stern expression we have already noticed. His eyes gazed on upon the scene, but with somewhat of a vacant aspect, and everything told that the spirit was busy in its tabernacle dealing with high thoughts. Nor could any one who looked upon him suppose that those thoughts were other than sad ones. Intense they certainly were; and certainly they were not gay.

Yet Bernard de Rohan had no remembered grief. Fate had indeed once struck him severely, but ever after had spared him altogether, had plucked not a flower from his bosom, nor cast a shadow on his path.

In early years he had lost both his parents, but that was

the only misfortune which had befallen him, and it was long ago. He scarcely remembered them; and all that remained was a soft memory, affectionate, but not painful. Since then his course had been from one bright thing to another. Wise and tender friends, the amusements, the sports, the studies of youth, virtue and honour, wealth and station, praise, success, and glory had been his. He had no thirst for power; so what could he want more? Had any one asked him that question, he would have replied, Nothing — nothing but what he might well hope to attain; and yet about an hour before the sun reached the edge of the sky, a fit of gloom fell upon him, dark, vague, unaccountable, like one of those mists that in mountain lands suddenly surround the wayfarer, shutting out the beauty and the brightness, and leaving all around dull, chilly, vague, uncertain, and confused.

For nearly half an hour he gave way to the sensations that oppressed him. They seemed at first too mighty to be struggled with. It was what in the language of northern poetry is called "having the cloud upon him," and he could not cast it off; till at length it seemed to rise gradually, and the power returned, first, of arguing with himself upon the unreasonableness of such feelings, and then of smiling — though with a mingled smile — at his own weakness in giving way to them.

The effect wore off; but he was still communing with himself on the sensations he had just experienced, when the page called his attention to the clouds that were gathering round the mountains. With that quick transition so common to hill countries, especially in the south, the sky was becoming rapidly obscured. The lurid masses of stormy vapour writhed themselves round the peaks; and although beneath their dark canopy a gleam of intense red light was seen marking the far western sky on the side of France, the whole heaven above was soon covered with a thick expanse of deep grey cloud. At a considerable distance, in the more open part of the country, which lay beyond the mouth of the defile, stretching in long lines of dark purple towards the sunset, appeared a large square tower, with some other neighbouring buildings, cutting with their straight lines the rounded forms of the trees.

"That must be Voiron," said the cavalier, as if in answer to his page's observation regarding the coming storm. "We must quicken our pace and reach shelter, or we shall have to pass half the night in cleaning our arms, if yonder frowning cloud fulfil one half its menaces."

"Voiron must be ten leagues off, sir," replied one of the attendants; "we shall not reach it this night."

"Then we must find some other covering," replied the master, gaily; "but at all events put to your spurs, for the battle has already begun."

Even as he spoke the large drops fell slowly and heavily, denting the dusty covering of the road. Bernard de Rohan and his followers rode on at full speed, though the descent was steep, the way bad, and the grey twilight creeping over the scene. Five minutes more brought them to a turn, where they could obtain a wider view; but, alas! no place of refuge was to be seen, except where the same tall dark tower rose heavily across the streaks of red light in the west, marking the place of some distant town or village. The attendants who had pictured to themselves during the morning's ride all the comforts of the cheerful inn, the good rich wine of Dauphiné, the stretching forth at ease of the strong laborious limb, the easy gossip with the village girls, the light-hearted song in the porch, and all the relaxing joys of an hour's idleness, now began to think of the long and tedious task of cleaning arms and clothing, and spending many an hour in rubbing the cold steel; and to say sooth, their lord also would have been better pleased with fairer weather.

The road, as such roads ever must do, wound its way round many a turn and angle of the rock; so that it was very possible for several persons to be within a short distance of each other, without the one who followed ever seeing him who was but a few hundred yards before him. At the spot which we have mentioned, Bernard de Rohan paused for a moment to look round for some place of shelter, and the road before him seemed perfectly clear and free. He could see completely into the valley on his right, and across the plains beyond, while the path which he was following could be traced along the side of the hill, round two or three sharp angles of the rock, about two hundred yards apart from each other. All at first was clear, as I have said, when suddenly there emerged at the salient point which cut that part of the sky where the light still lingered, the figure of a human being, which was lost again round the turn, almost as soon as it was seen.

"There is a peasant on a mule," exclaimed the cavalier, gladly. "We cannot be far from some village."

"It looks more like a priest on an ass, my lord," replied the attendant who had spoken before.

"Well, well," said his master, "we shall find the better lodgings."

"And the better wine," rejoined his follower; "but perhaps not the better welcome."

"Oh they are good men, these priests of Savoy," replied Bernard de Rohan, spurring on; "but we must not lose him again."

In a few minutes they again caught sight of the object of their pursuit. He was now much nearer, but still it was somewhat difficult to distinguish whether he were priest or peasant, till, coming up with him by dint of hard riding—for his long-eared charger was bearing him on at a rapid pace—they found that he was, as the attendant had supposed, a jovial priest; not, indeed, extravagantly fat, as but too many were in that day, but in good case of body, and bearing a countenance rosy with health, and apparently sparkling with a cheerful disposition. He seemed, indeed, to be of a character somewhat eccentric, for, contrary to all clerical rule, he had covered his head with one of the large straw hats of the peasantry, which accorded but ill with the rest of his habiliments. His features, which the young cavalier thought he had seen somewhere before, were good, with an expression of much sharpness; and though undoubtedly he heard the tramp of horses' feet behind him, in a land and in times not famous for safe travelling, either his conscience or his courage were so good, that he turned not his head to see who followed him thus closely, but kept his ass at the same brisk canter, while the young cavalier rode up to his side, and gave him the ordinary salutation of the day.

"A good evening to you, father!" said Bernard de Rohan, riding between him and the edge of the precipice.

"Pray let us have it quickly, my son," replied the priest; "for the one we have got seems likely to be as bad a one as ever I saw, at present."

"Indeed it is," answered the young gentleman, smiling at his somewhat cynical reply; "I am heartily glad to have met with you, my good father, for I trust you can show us some place of shelter."

"Good faith," replied the priest, turning for a moment to look at the cavalier's followers, "I cannot say I am so glad of the encounter; for where I am going, we cannot be sure of finding too many of the good things of this life, and the lion's portion is always sure to go to the fighting men."

"Nay, nay! we will share alike!" rejoined Bernard.

"Ay! but I am a king in those matters," answered the priest; "I do not like to share at all. But come on, come on; I am only jesting. We shall find plenty, I doubt not; for when last I passed that little inn, there was good meat and wine enough to have fed a refectory for a week, or an army for a year. Come on quick, I say, for yon foul-mouthed

railer at the top of the hill is beginning to roar at us, as well as spit at us. We have still far to go, and a storm in these mountains is like a dull jest, I can tell you, young gentleman; for one never knows what may come next."

"Why, what can come next," demanded the cavalier, "but fine weather after the storm?"

"A rock upon your head," replied the priest, "or an avalanche at your heels, which would smother you in your steel case like a lobster in his shell. Come on! come on!—Sancta Maria, why my small ass will outrun your tall charger now;" and bestowing a buffet with his straw hat upon the flank of his bearer, the beast quickened his pace still more, and, with a malicious whisk of the tail and fling with his hind feet, set off into a gallop. But we must pause to change the scene, and precede the travellers on their way.

CHAPTER II.

There are few situations in life which convey to the mind of man more completely the sensation of comfort, security, and repose, than when, after a long day's ride, he sits at ease by a glowing fire, and hears—while all the ready service of a well-conducted inn is in bustling activity to minister to his wants or satisfy his appetite—the rain patter and the tempest roar without. Nor is it from any selfish comparison of their own fate with that of others less happy that men derive this sensation, notwithstanding the dictum of the most selfish of would-be philosophers. It is, on the contrary, from a comparison of their own situation at the moment with what that situation sometimes has been, or might even then be, that the good and the generous experience such feelings; and though the thought of others, exposed to the tempest, must naturally cross their minds, yet that thought is mixed with pity and regret.

The little inn towards which Bernard de Rohan and his companions were proceeding, under the guidance of the priest, when last we left them, though the village in which it stood contained not above nine or ten cottages, was good for the time and the country. Its only sitting room, of course, was the great kitchen, into which the door opened from the road; but that kitchen was well fenced from the wind and rain; the windows were small and cased in stone; the door was sheltered by a deep porch, where host and travellers sat and

amused themselves in the summer daytime; and as it was the first house met with after passing some of the steepest mountains between France and Piedmont, everything was done to make it attractive in the eyes of weary wayfarers.

The thunder had passed, the air had become cold and raw, the night was as dark as a bad man's thoughts, a fierce wind was blowing, and the heavy rain dashed in gusts against the clattering casements; but all those indications of the harsh and boisterous state of the weather without did but serve to make the scene within seem more comfortable to the eyes of a traveller who sat in one of the large seats within the sheltering nook of the chimney, watching the busy hostess prepare more than one savoury mess for his supper on the bright wood fire that blazed upon the hearth. In the meantime, several attendants of various kinds might be seen in different parts of the wide kitchen cleaning and drying harness, clothes, baldrics, and weapons, or preparing other matters for the service of their lord, with all the devices of courtly luxury.

Those attendants, however, were not the attendants of Bernard de Rohan, nor was the traveller that cavalier himself; he being yet upon his way thither, and enduring all the fury of the storm.

The one of whom I now speak was a man of about the same age, but rather older. He was decidedly a handsomer man also: his features were all finer in form; he was taller; his complexion was fairer, without, however, being effeminate, and it was evident, too, that he knew his personal advantages, and was somewhat vain of them. He was dressed with much splendour, according to the fashion of that day; and though he seemed to have met with some part of the storm, it was clear that he had not been long exposed to it.

In short, as he sat there, he might well be pronounced one of the handsomest and most splendid cavaliers of his day; but there was a something which a closely observing eye might detect in the hanging brow and curling lip that was not altogether pleasant. It could scarcely be called a sneer; yet there was something supercilious and contemptuous in it too. Nor was it altogether haughty, though pride undoubtedly had its share. It was a dark and yet not a gloomy expression. It seemed as if the heart that lay beneath was full of many an unfathomable idea, and proud of its impenetrability. The thoughts might be good or bad; but it was evidently a countenance of much thought under a mask of lightness—a deep lake beneath a ripple.

The stranger had, as we have said, been looking on while

the hostess, with a bustling maid, prepared manifold dishes for his supper, and he added, from time to time, a gay jest to either of them upon the progress of the work. His tone was familiar and easy; but it might be remarked that his jest always arose from something that came beneath his eye, and that in general he took no notice whatever of the reply, scarcely seeming to hear that any one else spoke, and making no rejoinder, but letting the matter drop till he thought fit to jest again.

At length, however, he said, "I prithee, dame, double yon portion of steaks from the roe-deer, and add me some twenty eggs to the omelet. You will have more visitors shortly."

The good woman started up with a look of some surprise, and might, perhaps have thought her guest a conjurer, had not his words been followed so closely by the noise of horses' feet, that the source of his knowledge was evident at once. A moment after, voices were heard calling, and the aubergiste, who had been aiding some of the servants at the other side of the kitchen, opened the door carefully and looked forth. The cold wind rushed in fiercely, like a besieging army into a stormed city, and the yellow wax flambeau which the host carried to the door, and which, in that land of bees, was in those days common to every country inn, was extinguished in a moment, notwithstanding the fierce flame wherewith it burned.

All on that side of the wide dingy room was now in darkness; but voices were heard as of many persons speaking, with cries for horseboys and hostlers, in the easily distinguished tongues of attendants, while the landlord assured the travellers again and again that he would bestow upon them a thousand-fold better accommodation and entertainment than there was the least chance of their obtaining in reality.

At the same time, a full rich merry voice was heard chuckling at the boasts of mine host, and exclaiming, "Ay, ay, landlord! is it not so? We shall have dolphins and mullets, ortolans and beccaficos, musk sherbet from Constantinople, true Roman Falernian mingled with honey, and, to crown all, a Pythagorean peacock! Nothing less will serve us in this cold night; though, methinks, a good capon and a tankard of mulled Avignon claret* would warm me well, were it but ready this minute."

While the jovial priest, whom I have described in the first

* The first time I ever find the word claret used, it is applied to the wine of Avignon.

chapter of this true history, descended from his ass, joking at every movement with the host, Bernard de Rohan, smiling at his new companion's merriment, sprang to the ground and entered the kitchen of the inn, leaving his attendants to lead round the horses to the stables at the back of the building. It might not, it is true, be very satisfactory to him to find that the inn was so fully tenanted, as he soon saw that it was; but he was one of those who fail not to enjoy what may fall to their lot, as far as possible; and as he advanced towards the fire, he thanked Heaven for a place of shelter from the rude buffeting of the storm.

In the meanwhile, the first occupant of the inn continued, with that air of self-satisfied indifference which has been a part of the affectation of the pampered and insolent in all ages, to look at nothing but the proceedings of some rebellious sticks upon the hearth, which resisted all the soft persuasions of the woman whom the hostess had left to tend the savoury messes at the fire, while she herself aided her husband in receiving, like Hope, her new visitors with false promises. The occupant of the chimney corner looked neither to the right nor to the left; and to have judged by his countenance, one would have supposed that he heard not one sound of all the many that were stirring around him, nor had a greater interest in anything on earth than in the cooking of a steak of roe venison. Even when Bernard de Rohan advanced with his arms jingling as he trod, and after a momentary glance at him, laid hold of his arm with a friendly smile, the stranger merely turned round with a look of perfect unconcern to see who it was that either in enmity or good-fellowship thus called his attention.

When he saw who it was, however, he became more animated, and rising with a smile, shook hands with him warmly. "Ha! Bernard de Rohan!" he exclaimed—"I can hardly believe my eyes. Why, Baron, who would have thought to meet you thus in a Savoyard inn? Have you then quitted Italy to follow Guise, and meet the enemy in the north? You have not thrown by the spear and sword, I see! But, in a word, say, what do you here?"

"Why, to say truth," replied the other, "nothing is now to be done beyond the Apennines; and though, as you might well know, after all that occurred at Civita, I am as little likely to follow Guise as a greyhound is to hunt in company with a lion, yet there is no use in staying behind when he has not only left the field himself, but taken all his forces with him. I am tired of this warfare, too! I long for some repose.

I have now been three years absent from France, and I have a yearning to see my own land once more."

"Yes, and some fair dame therein," rejoined his companion. "Is it not so, De Rohan? I remember well you seemed to have but small delight in the bright eyes of the young Italians, and I often thought that it must be some remembered love of the past that kept you thus heart-whole."

"It may be so, Count," replied Bernard, gaily. "What man is there without a lady-love? If there be one, he is neither fit for war nor peace: he wants the great excitement to glory, and courtesy, and great deeds. But even had it not been for that, Meyrand," he added, more seriously, "I love the ladies of my own land best. Bright looks are little to me without true hearts, and beauty but a frail substitute for goodness."

"Pshaw, sir moralizer!" cried his companion,—"beauty is a woman's best possession till she be old; and then, when she has done with the graces, let her take up with the virtues, or the muses, or anything else she likes."

"Let her take up with anything, in short," said the jolly priest, coming forward to the fire, and shaking his gown to dry it—"Let her take up with anything but a libertine, a fop, or a courtier. Let her bear age, or ugliness, or anything, but children to fools—so shall she do well in this world and the next! Is it not so, gay sir?"

The Count de Meyrand stared at him with a look of haughty surprise; but he found that the priest was as indifferent as he could be, and he relapsed for a minute or two into silence, while the page of Bernard de Rohan came up to disarm his lord. The operation was somewhat long, and by the time it was accomplished, the trestles had been brought forth from their corner, the long wooden boards which, joined up the middle, served for a table, had been taken from the wall against which they stood, and laid upon those trestles, and over all a fine white tablecloth had been spread, with the salt in the midst.

Plate after plate of well-cooked viands, emitting an odour most savoury to hungry men, was next placed on the board by the neat hostess, and the Count, with Bernard de Rohan in the buff jerkin he had worn under his armour, moved to take their seats at the head of the table. The priest sat down beside his young travelling companion, while a sneering smile curled the lip of Meyrand, and he could not refrain from saying, in a low but not inaudible voice, "Why, Baron,

what a princely youth you have become, to travel with your fool, and in canonicals too."

Bernard did not reply; and the priest, though he heard every word, said nothing till, the attendants having all ranged themselves at the lower end of the table, together with the host and hostess, he proceeded to bless the meat. He had scarcely concluded, however, when the door of the inn suddenly opened, and a person in the garb of a servant rushed in. He was without hat or cloak, and there was a cut, though but a slight one, upon his forehead. "Help, help!" he cried, gazing eagerly around the circle—"Help, help! they are carrying away my Lord of Masseran and my young lady, to murder them in the mountains."

These words produced a very different effect upon the persons who heard them. The Count of Meyrand sat perfectly still and indifferent, listening with his usual air of cool self-possession to all that the man said, and never ceasing to carve with his dagger the meat that was before him, on which he had just commenced when the interruption took place.

On the other hand, Bernard de Rohan and each of his servants, as if moved by the same impulse, started up at once. The young gentleman's left hand fell naturally to grasp the scabbard of his sword, and before the man had done speaking, he had taken three steps towards the door of the inn.

Two or three circumstances, however, occurred to interrupt him for a moment. There were various confused movements on the part of many persons present, and a clamour of several tongues all speaking at once.

At the same time, the Count exclaimed, "Stay one moment, Baron! Stay and drink one cup of wine with me before you go out in this sweet stormy night to help one of the greatest scoundrels that Savoy can produce or France either. Stay, stay one moment! Well," he added, seeing Bernard de Rohan turn from him with a look of impatience, "well, go and help Masseran, if you will! Heaven send the rogues may have cut his throat before you reach them!"

"Your horse, my lord!" cried one of the attendants. "Your armour, sir!" said another. "No, no, on foot! on foot!" cried Bernard de Rohan; "on foot as we are! Time is everything. Lead on, fellow! lead on! Send us out torches, mine host!"

The jovial priest had started up almost at the same time as his travelling companion. "By our Lady, I will go with you!" he cried, "to shrive the dying. It is a part of a priest's trade; though I confess, if I were knight, and noble

and gallant cavalier, I would stay where I am, like this brave Count, and exercise my chivalry upon venison and tankards of wine."

While he was speaking, there drew out from some dark corner of the inn-kitchen—where he had remained unnoticed by any one—a tall thin gaunt man, with a straw hat on his head, and a large coarse brown cloak enveloping almost the whole of his figure. He took three steps forward into the full light, and certainly there had seldom been seen a more striking, if not a more handsome, countenance, or a more remarkable and even graceful bearing, than that which the stranger presented. He was a man apparently about five-and-thirty years of age, with aquiline features, large black flashing eyes, the bronze of sun and wind and storm upon his face, and five or six deep scars upon his cheek and brow. He was remarkably erect in person, and though certainly meagre, was broad-shouldered and muscular, or rather, perhaps, I may say, sinewy; for the hand that grasped his cloak, and the part of the arm and wrist seen above it, displayed the strong markings of the muscles like cords under the skin.

He came directly in the way of Bernard de Rohan, as the young cavalier advanced towards the door; and it must be confessed that there was something strange and startling in the sudden apparition of the stranger, which made the other pause, and, with an involuntary motion, advance his right hand towards the hilt of his sword.

He drew it back again instantly, however, somewhat ashamed of the movement, while the new personage thus brought upon the stage said, in a deep but melodious voice, "I will go with you, too, young gentleman, and may do you better service than our good friend the priest here."

"But, Master Leon!" exclaimed the landlord of the inn, advancing towards him with an entreating look.

"Hush!" cried the stranger, holding up his hand, and at the same moment the jovial priest turned also upon the host, exclaiming, "Fry your eggs, fry your eggs, Gandelot, and leave other people to fry theirs. Don't be afraid! we'll not toss the omelet into the fire, nor spill the grease, nor set the chimney in a blaze. You know me, and I know him; and, though he is the last man that should say I can't do good service when I like it, yet I will go with him without a quarrel!"

When every one is speaking at once, a conversation which would be otherwise long is very rapidly brought to a conclusion; and though, as we have seen, there were here two

or three interlocutors, all that we have described scarcely interrupted Bernard de Rohan half a minute. "Lead on, lead on, then!" he exclaimed, impatiently, addressing the servant who had made the appeal for assistance, and to whom the Count de Meyrand had been addressing a few words in a low tone. "Lead on, I say, quick!" and in another moment they were all beyond the door of the inn, and standing upon the mountain side in the cold air of night.

The Count remained at the table; and, shaping their conduct upon that of their lord, not one of his servants attempted to move. Meyrand, however, did not, upon the whole, seem particularly well satisfied with what had taken place. Perhaps he might not be quite contented with the inactive part he was playing; and it is certain he asked himself whether Bernard de Rohan could attribute his conduct to any want of courage. He recollected, however, that they had mounted to the assault of many a well-defended breach together, and he felt sure that there could be no doubt of that kind on his companion's mind. He remained in thought, however, for a minute or two longer, forgetting even the supper that was before him, and the air of indifference which he usually bore; but at length he beckoned one of his men to his side, and spoke a few words to him in a very low tone, only suffering the two last to be heard: they were, "You understand!"

The man bowed his head in reply, called three of his companions away from the table, sought hastily in the different corners of the inn-kitchen for various offensive weapons, and then left the place, as if to follow and assist Bernard de Rohan and his party.

CHAPTER III.

It had nearly ceased raining, but the night, as we have said, was cold and chilly, the sky was still covered with thick clouds, and the air was full of thick darkness—to use the expressive words of Scripture; a darkness that could be felt. Bernard de Rohan and his companions paused for a moment before the door of the little inn, listening to catch any sounds of the conflict from which the servant seemed so freshly to have come.

All was silent, however. The rushing sound of the mountain torrents, swelled by the late rains; the sighing of the night winds amongst the gorges of the mountains and through the deep pine forests; the distant cry of a wolf, and the

whirring scream of the night hawk, as it flitted by, were all heard distinctly; but no human voice mingled with the other sounds.

This silence, however, gave no assurance to the heart of Bernard de Rohan that the persons for whom the servant had appealed to his chivalry had escaped from their assailants. It was well known at that time that every part of Savoy was infested with bands of brigands, which had rather increased than diminished in number since France had taken possession of the country; so that, unable to put them down, the famous Maréchal de Brissac, in order to restrain their indiscriminate ravages in some degree, had been obliged to give them occasional employment with his own forces. When not thus employed, however, they were known to lay wait in all the principal passes, both of Piedmont and Savoy, and take toll of all travellers with a strong hand. Enormous barbarities were from time to time charged against them; and if one might judge by general rumour, no scheme was too wild, no act too violent and desperate, for them to devise and execute. The only conclusion, therefore, which Bernard de Rohan drew from the absence of all sounds of conflict, was that the banditti had prevailed, and either murdered their victims or carried them off.

"Quick! quick!" he cried, after that momentary pause. "Lead on, lead on, good fellow! where are your lord and lady? Which is the way?"

"This way, noble sir, this way," cried the man, advancing at once along the road which led more immediately into the mountains. "They cannot have gone far: I could hear the voices of the brigands from the inn door."

Thus saying, he led the way onward with great speed; but as Bernard de Rohan followed with the same quick pace, the clear deep voice of the man whom the host had called Master Leon sounded in his ear, saying, "There is some mistake here, and I think some villany; but fear not."

"Fear!" replied Bernard de Rohan, turning his head towards him. "Do you suppose I fear?"

"No, I suppose not," replied the man; "but yet there was no common interest in your eye, good youth, when this knave talked of his young mistress, and one may fear for others though not for themselves. But hark! I hear a noise on before. Voices speaking. Some one complaining, I think. Quick, quick! run, sir varlet, run!"

At the rapid pace at which they now proceeded, they soon heard the sounds more distinctly before them. There was a noise of horses, and a jingling as of the bells of mules. The

murmuring of a number of voices, too, came borne upon the air down the pass, and some four or five hundred yards farther up, the servant, who was now running on as fast as possible, stumbled over a wounded man, who uttered a cry of pain. But the young cavalier and his companions slackened not their pace, for by this time they could plainly hear some sharp and angry voices pouring forth oaths and imprecations, and urging what seemed to be a band of prisoners, to hurry forward more rapidly. At the same time the light of a torch, or more than one, was seen gleaming upon the grey rocks and green foliage, and on one occasion it threw upon the flat face of a crag on the other side of the ravine the shadow of a large body of men with horses, and other beasts of burden.

"Now, out with your swords," cried the personage named Leon, in a tone of authority, "for we are gaining on them quick, and I doubt not shall have stout resistance."

Bernard de Rohan's sword was already in his hand before the other spoke, and hurrying on, the next moment he reached an angle of the rock, from which he could plainly discern the whole party that he was pursuing. He paused for an instant as he saw them, and well might that sight make him do so, for the torchlight displayed to his eyes a body of at least fifteen or sixteen armed men, some of them mounted, some of them on foot, driving on in the midst of them two or three loaded horses, and seven or eight men and women, several of them apparently having their hands tied. The party was about two hundred yards in advance, and though the torchlight was sufficient to show him the particulars which we have mentioned, yet it did no more than display the gleaming of the arms and the fluttering of the women's garments, without at all giving any indication of the rank or station to which the prisoners belonged.

The young cavalier, it must be remembered, was accompanied by only five persons, and the greater part of those five were, like himself, but lightly armed. His momentary pause, however, was only to reconnoitre the enemy, without the slightest hesitation as to what his own conduct was to be. He knew the effect of a sudden and unexpected attack, and calculated upon some assistance also from the prisoners themselves; but had he had nothing but his own courage in his favour, his conduct would have been the same. He was again hurrying on, when the powerful grasp of the man named Leon was laid upon his arm, and stayed him.

"Hush!" he said; "do not be too quick! Do you not see that these men are no brigands, as you thought?"

"How should I see that?" demanded Bernard de Rohan, turning sharply upon him. "Who but brigands would commit an act like this?"

"Think you that brigands would have torches with them?" said his companion, calmly. "Pause a moment, pause a moment: let them get round yon point of the rock; for if they hear us coming, and see how few we are, we shall be obliged to do things that we had better not. Beyond the rock they will be cooped up in a little basin of the hills, where they can be attacked with advantage."

"You seem to know the country well," said Bernard de Rohan, gazing upon him with some suspicion, as the light of the torches faintly reflected from the other side of the valley served partially to display his dark, but fine countenance.

"Ay! I do know it well!" replied the other: "so well, that from the foot of that rock which they are now turning, I will guide you up by a path over the shoulder of the hill till we meet them in front, at the same time that some of your people attack them in the rear."

Bernard de Rohan did now hesitate; but it was only for a moment. His mind was not naturally a suspicious one; and, of course, had the proposal been made by any one whom he knew, the advantages of such a plan would have instantly struck him, and he would have followed it at once. But the man who suggested it was unknown to him. Nay, more, there was something in his tone, his manner, in his whole appearance, which, to say the best, was strange and unusual. His garb, as far as it had been seen, was unlike that of the peasantry of Savoy; and, in short, there was that about him which naturally tended to create a doubt as to his ordinary pursuits and occupations.

Bernard de Rohan hesitated then, but it was with the hesitation of only one moment. He had been accustomed to deal with and to command fierce and reckless men; and though his years were not sufficient to have given him what may be called the *insight of experience*, he had by nature that clear discernment of the human character which is the meed of some few, and may be called the *insight of instinct*.

During his momentary pause, then, he saw that the dark eye of his strange companion was fixed upon him, as if reading what was passing in his mind. The jovial priest also seemed to penetrate his thoughts, and said in a low voice, "You may trust him! You may trust him! He never betrayed any one."

"I do trust him," cried Bernard de Rohan, turning round

and grasping the stranger's hand, "I trust him entirely. You and I," he continued, "will go over the hill alone. If I judge right, we have both been in many a hot day's strife, and can keep that narrow road without much assistance. It is better that there should be a show of more people behind."

As he spoke, the faint flash of the receding torches showed him a smile upon his companion's countenance. "Come on slowly," said Corse de Leon, "and keep near the rock; we shall soon get up with them, for they are encumbered and we are free."

Thus saying, he led the way, remaining, as far as possible, under the shadow of the crags, till the last of the party before them had turned the angle beyond, and the whole valley was again in darkness. The cavalier and those who were with him then hurried their pace, till they reached a spot where a point of the rock jutted out into the valley. There the stranger paused, bidding the attendants of the young nobleman pursue their way along the road, till they came up with the rear of the other party, and then attack them as suddenly and vehemently as possible. "Make all speed," he said, "for we shall be there before you, cutting off the corner of the hill.—Here, priest!" he continued, "here's a pistol and a dagger for you. You'll need something to work with. Now, quick on your way, for the moon will be out in a few minutes, if one may judge by the paleness of that cloud's edge, and her light would betray our scanty numbers.—Follow me, Baron!—Here! Upon this rock!—Catch by that bough!—Another step, and you are in the path!"

As he spoke, he himself sprang up, seeming well acquainted with every stock and every stone in the way; Bernard de Rohan followed with less knowledge of the path, but all the agility of youth and strength, and they had soon nearly reached the brow of the hill.

"Out upon the pale moon!" cried Bernard de Rohan's companion, pausing and gazing up towards the sky. "She shines at the very moment she should not. See how she is casting away those clouds, as if she were opening the hangings of her tent! We may go slow, for we shall be far before them."

He now led the way onward with a slower pace; and after ascending for somewhat more than a quarter of a mile, the path began to descend again as if to rejoin the road. Every step was now clear, for the moon was shining brightly; and though no one, probably, could see Bernard de Rohan and

his companion as they took their way amongst the rhododendrons and junipers which were thickly mingled with the fragments of rock around, yet they themselves from time to time caught a distinct view of the valley. An occasional flash of light upon their left hand, too, but a good deal in the rear, soon showed Bernard de Rohan that his guide had told him the truth in regard to the shortness of the path he had taken, though he could not absolutely see the road, or those who were travelling along it. At length, however, they reached a spot where the path which they were following wound along within ten yards of the chief road itself, and choosing a small break nearly surrounded with tall shrubs and broken masses of the crag, Corse de Leon stopped, saying, "It will be well to stay for their coming here. They will take full ten minutes to reach this place. You wait for them here; I will climb a little farther up, to watch them as they come, and will be back again in time."

If Bernard de Rohan entertained any suspicion in regard to his guide's purposes, he knew that it would be vain to show it, and therefore he made no opposition to the plan that his companion proposed, but let him depart without a word; and then choosing a spot amongst the trees, where he could see without being seen, he gazed down into the little basin formed by the surrounding hills. The clear light of the moon was now streaming bright and full into the valley, only interrupted from time to time for a single moment by fragments of the clouds driven across by the wind; but at first Bernard de Rohan could see nothing of the party which he was pursuing; for the road as usual wound in and out along the irregular sides of the mountain, being raised upon a sort of terrace some two hundred feet above the bottom of the valley. In a moment or two, however, he caught sight of them again, coming slowly on; but with their torches now extinguished, and presenting nothing but a dark mass, brightened here and there by the reflection of the moon's light from some steel cap or breastplate.

The time seemed long, and their advance slow, to Bernard de Rohan; for although he had lain in many an ambush against the foe, and had taken part in many an encounter where the odds against him were scarcely less than those which were now presented, yet of course he could not but feel some emotion in awaiting the result — that deep and thrilling interest, in fact, which has nothing to do with fear, and approaches perhaps even nearer to joy — the interest which can only be felt in the anticipation of a fierce but noble strife, where, knowing the amount of all we risk, we stake

life and all life's blessings upon the success of some great and generous endeavour. He felt all this, and all the emotions which such a state must bring with it, and thus, longing to throw the die, he found the moments of expectation long.

Now seen, and now lost to his sight, the party continued to advance, and yet his strange companion did not make his appearance. The young nobleman judged that he could not be far, indeed, for once or twice he heard the bushes above him rustle, while a stone or two rolled down into the bottom of the valley; and he thought he distinguished Leon's voice murmuring also, as if talking to himself. At length there was a clear footfall heard coming down the steepest part of the mountain, and in another moment the stranger stood once more by Bernard de Rohan's side. As he came near, he threw off the cloak which he had hitherto worn, and cast it into one of the bushes, saying to it as he did so, "I shall find you, if I want you, after this is over."

His appearance now, however, left Bernard de Rohan scarcely a doubt in regard to the nature of his usual occupation. When his cloak was thus thrown off, his chest and shoulders were seen covered with that peculiar sort of corselet or brigantine, which originally gave name to the bands called Brigands. His arms were free, and unencumbered with any defensive armour; and over his right shoulder hung a buff baldric, suspending his long heavy sword. This was not all, however; another broad leather belt and buckle went round his waist, containing, in cases made on purpose for them, a store of other weapons, if his sword-blade should chance to fail: amongst which were those long and formidable knives which in the wars of the day were often employed by foot-soldiers to kill the chargers of their mounted adversaries. Daggers of various lengths were there also, together with the petronel, or large horse-pistol, which was so placed, however, as to give free room for his hand to reach the hilt of his sword.

In this guise, he approached Bernard de Rohan, saying, "You see, Baron, I am better prepared for this encounter than you are. You have nothing but your sword, you had better take one of these," and he laid his finger upon the but of a petronel.

"My sword will not fail me," replied Bernard de Rohan, with a smile. "I see, indeed, you were better qualified to judge whether these are brigands or not than I was."

"They are no brigands," replied the other—"brigands know better what they are about," and as he spoke he threw away his hat, and tied up his long black hair, which fell over his ears and shoulders, with a piece of riband. "I cannot

very well understand," he continued in the same low tone, "what has become of your people and the priest; I could see nothing of them from the height, and I almost fear that these villains, fearing pursuit, have broken down the little wooden bridge behind them, at what we call the Pas de Suzzette, where the stream falls into the river."

"Hark!" said Bernard de Rohan. "They are coming up," and grasping his sword, he took a step forward.

"Wait," said the Brigand, laying hold of his arm. "Give your people the last minute to attack them in the rear. By heavens, they ought to have been here by this time."

The sound of horses' feet and human voices now became distinct from below, and oaths and imprecations were still heard loud and vehemently, as the captors hurried on their prisoners.

"Get you on, get you on!" exclaimed one voice; "don't you see how quietly your lord is going!"

"He is not my lord!" cried another, in a faint tone. "I am wounded and hurt, and cannot go faster."

"Get on, get on, villain!" reiterated the other voice. "You would fain keep us till the fools behind mend the bridge and come up with us. Get on, I say! — If he do not walk faster, prick him with your dagger, Bouchart. We will skin him alive when we get to the end of the march! Drive it into him!"

A sharp cry succeeded — Bernard de Rohan could bear no more, but bursting away from the hand of the Brigand, he sprang into the road. Leon followed him at once; but even before he was down, the young cavalier's sword had stretched one of the advancing party on the ground, and was crossed with that of another.

"Hold, hold!" shouted the loud voice of the Brigand. "Hold, and throw down your arms! Villains, you are surrounded on all sides!"

For a moment their opponents had drawn back; but the scanty number of the assailants was seen, before Corse de Leon uttered what seemed so empty a boast.

"Cut him down!" cried a voice from behind, "cut him down!" and one of the horsemen spurred on towards him. Another, at the same moment, aimed a blow at the head of Bernard de Rohan from behind, which struck him on the shoulder and brought him on his knee, while a shot was fired at the Brigand, which struck his cuirass, but glanced off harmless.

"It is time we should have help," said Corse de Leon, in a cool tone, and—while with his right hand he drew a pistol from his girdle, levelled it at the head of one of those who

were contending with Bernard de Rohan, fired, and saw the man fall over into the valley below — with the left he applied a small instrument to his lips, producing a loud, long, shrill whistle, which those who have heard it will never forget. It is like the scream of a bird of prey, but infinitely louder; and the moment it proceeded from the lips of the Brigand, similar sounds echoed round and round from twenty different points above, below, and on the opposite side of the valley.

When Bernard de Rohan staggered up from his knee, the scene was completely changed. Corse de Leon stood no longer alone, but with three stout men by his side armed to the teeth. The fragments of rock and large stones that were rolling from above showed that rapid footsteps were coming down the side of the mountain. Up from the rocky bed of the stream five or six other men were seen climbing with the activity of the chamois or the izzard, and to complete the whole, the whistle was still heard prolonged up the valley, while, from the same side, the ear could distinguish the galloping of horse coming down with furious speed.

The party of the adversary, however, was large. All were well armed; all evidently accustomed to strife and danger, and had all apparently made up their minds to struggle to the last. They accordingly made a fierce charge at once along the road, in order to force their way on; and the strife now became hand to hand, and man to man, while, above the contest, the loud voice of the Brigand leader was heard shouting, "Tie them! Tie them! — Do not kill them, if you can help it!"

Nor was his assumption of certain success unjustified. Every moment fresh numbers were added to the party of Corse de Leon. The adversaries were driven back along the road, dragging the prisoners with them some way, but were stopped by fresh opponents, dropping, as it were, from the mountains, and cutting them off in their retreat. They were still struggling, however, when at length eight or nine horsemen, the sound of whose approach had been heard before, reached the scene of combat, and then, seeing that farther resistance was vain, several of them uttered a cry of "Quarter! quarter! We will throw down our arms."

"Here, take my sword, Doland," said the Brigand leader to one of his men. "Wipe it well, and go back for my hat and cloak which I left amongst the bushes by the cross of St. Maur. — Well, Baron," he continued, turning to Bernard de Rohan, "I am afraid you have to regret the want of your armour — that was a bad blow on your head."

"No, it struck my shoulder," replied Bernard de Rohan, "where my buff coat is doubled. There is no great harm done."

"You had better keep behind," continued Corse de Leon, in a low voice. "I wished not to have displayed my men at all, had it been possible to avoid it; but it could not be helped. However, you had better not show yourself with us. It may make mischief."

"But the lady," said Bernard de Rohan, "the lady! — let me go and speak to her, and set her free; I have no fear of being seen."

"Leave it to me—leave it to me," said the Brigand. "You shall have opportunity enough to speak with her. And she shall know who is her deliverer. — Will you not trust me, after all this night's work?"

"Entirely," replied Bernard de Rohan; "but it is natural, when one aids a lady in scenes like these, to wish to speak with her, to soothe and tranquillize her."

"Especially when one loves her," replied the Brigand, laughing. "But you shall speak with her in a moment, only keep back for the present."

Bernard de Rohan had neither the will nor the power to resist. The Brigand, indeed, might well assume the tone of command, for at that moment there could be no successful opposition to his will; but, besides this consideration, there were other feelings in the bosom of the young cavalier which inclined him to yield at once.

Everything that he had seen was calculated to surprise and perplex him. The knowledge which his strange companion seemed to have of his history and circumstances; the state of active preparation in which he had found him, as if he had been aware long before of all that was about to occur, and had taken measures to meet every contingency; the interest which he had shown in an enterprise that seemed not to concern him at all, and the active and vehement opposition he had evinced to persons apparently engaged in the same trade of violence with himself, were all unaccountable to Bernard de Rohan; and he paused in some anxiety to see what would be the next act in the strange drama in which he himself was bearing a part.

While the brief conversation which I have narrated took place between the Brigand and the young cavalier, the successful party had drawn closer and closer round their adversaries, and were busily disarming and tying them. This operation, being carried on with great dexterity and rapidity,

had advanced considerably, when Leon again strode forward into the midst of them to give farther directions.

"Not so tight! Not so tight, Antoine!" he said: "you'll cut his wrists with those thongs. Take off his corselet, Pierre. You cannot get it off when his arms are tied. — If he resists, pitch him over into the stream. — That horse will break away and be lost. — Some of you come and untie my Lord of Masseran and his people. — Noble Signior," he continued, and Bernard de Rohan thought that he heard a good deal of bitter mockery in his tone, "I pray you tell me what is to be done with these insolent villains who have dared to lay violent hands upon you and your lady wife's fair daughter. Shall we put them to death on the spot — which, perhaps, would be the wisest plan, as the dead are very silent; or shall we send them, bound hand and foot, to your châtean, that you may give them your own directions as to what they are to say and do?"

These words were addressed to a tall, graceful man, somewhere between forty and fifty years of age, who had appeared as one amongst the prisoners of the party just overthrown. He seemed not particularly well pleased with the Brigand's speech, and replied in a tone somewhat sullen, "You must do with them as you please, sir, and with us also, though from your words I suppose that you mean us good and not evil."

"Oh, certainly, my good lord," replied the other — "I am here to free you, and you shall be safely conducted by my people to your own abode. Am I, by your authority, then, to treat these men as they deserve?"

The Lord of Masseran seemed to hesitate for a moment, but then replied, sharply, "By all means! By all means! They well deserve punishment."

"Oh! spare them! spare them!" cried a lady's voice. "They have done evil, certainly; but they might have treated us worse. Do not hurt them, sir."

"Lady," replied the Brigand, "I will only punish them as they deserve, and you yourself shall hear the sentence. Strip off every man's coat. Take off the bridles of their horses, and therewith flog them down the valley to Gandelot's Inn. When they are there, they will know what to do with themselves. Now, lady, this is but small measure of retribution for bad acts. — Quick, my men, quick! — You must take them over the hill, for the bridge is broken."

He then spoke a few words to one of his companions in a low tone; after which, he returned once more to Bernard de Rohan, who had remained behind, asked particularly after

the wounds he had received, and inquired whether he were fit to escort a lady some two leagues that night. He spoke with a smile; and there was no hesitation in the young cavalier's reply. Before their short conversation was ended, the Brigand's orders in regard to his prisoners were in the act of execution; and certain it is that the discipline to which they were subjected was sufficiently severe, if one might judge by many a piteous cry which echoed up the valley, for some minutes after they were driven in a crowd down the road. The young lady covered her eyes with her hands, and remained silent; but a grim smile came upon the countenance of the Lord of Masseran, as if there was something pleasant to him in the music of human suffering.

There were still some ten or twelve of Leon's band around; and their next task was to untie the hands of such of the Lord of Masseran's people as were still bound. "Now, sir," continued the Brigand, as soon as this was accomplished, "you shall have good escort back to your château. But we must go in separate parties. You and your four servants, under the careful protection of Elois here, by the mountain path you know of. The young lady, I myself will escort by the longer, but the smoother road."

"Nay, nay!" exclaimed the Lord of Masseran, quickly; "why separate us? If you mean well by her, why not let ——"

"Because it pleases me not," replied the Brigand, in a stern tone. "Who is lord here upon the side of the mountain but I? You are lord in your château, and none dare answer you. But I am lord in the moonlight and on the hillside, and none shall answer me."

"Oh! in pity, in pity!" exclaimed the young lady, holding out her hands with a gesture of entreaty. But the Brigand advanced to her horse's side, and spoke a word to her in a low tone. She let her hands drop again without reply, and Bernard de Rohan, who had remained in the shade, while the moonlight fell full upon her, could see her eyes suddenly turn towards the spot where he stood.

"Lead on the Lord of Masseran, Elois!" said the voice of Corse de Leon. "Leave that poor fellow who seems wounded with the lady; and take the rest with you."

There was no reply, and the Savoyard nobleman, with his companions, was led on by a strong party of the brigands up the valley, and then across the stream. As he passed Bernard de Rohan, he fixed his eyes upon him for a moment, but made no observation; and at the same time the Brigand

held up his finger to the young cavalier, as if directing him still to forbear for a time.

As soon as the hill hid the other party from their sight, Bernard de Rohan, unable to bear the restraint any longer, sprang forward to the lady's side, and threw his arms around her. His head was bare, and as he looked up towards her, the moonlight fell full upon his face. As if still doubtful, however, she gazed wildly and eagerly upon him: parted the curls of his hair with her hands back from his forehead: then threw her arms round his neck, and bending her head, wept upon his shoulder.

CHAPTER IV.

"At length! at length! Bernard," said the voice of the young lady; and the heart of Bernard de Rohan echoed the words "At length! at length!" as he pressed her hand in his.

"At length! at length! Bernard," she said, "you have come back to me!"

"Did you not send me from you, yourself, Isabel?" he said, thinking there was something almost reproachful in her tone. "And have I not returned the moment you told me I might—the moment you called me to aid, and I trust to deliver you? Would I ever have quitted you, but at your own word?"

"It is true! it is all true!" she said, in a gentle tone; "but I knew not, dear Bernard, all that was to befal me—all the painful, the anxious circumstances in which I was to be placed. We were then too young, far too young, for me to press my father's promise. I had no right to rob you of so many years of glory. My brother, too, wanted protection and guidance in the field. At that time, everything looked bright, and I thought that you, Bernard, would lead him to honour and bring him back in safety. I knew you would, and you have done it. But in those days I little dreamed that my mother, in her widowhood, would willingly wed a stranger, and make her hand the hire of this Savoyard to serve the cause of France against his native prince. But you have returned to me, Bernard," she continued, in a more joyful tone—"you have returned to me, and all will be well again."

So ever thinks the inexperienced heart of youth, when

even for a single moment the dark clouds break away, and a ray of sunshine, however transient, brightens up a day of storms.

"Be not too sure of that, lady!" said the deep voice of the Brigand—"be not too sure of that! There have been more dangers around you already than you know of. They have not yet passed away, and perchance may fall upon him as well as you."

"Heaven forbid!" she cried, turning her eyes first upon the countenance of the man who spoke, and then with a softer and a tenderer look upon her lover. "If it is to be so, I shall wish you back again, Bernard."

"Not so," said the Brigand, "not so! We are fools to think that life is to be a bright day, uncheckered with storms or with misfortunes. There is but one summer in the year, lady: the winter is as long; the autumn has its frosts and its sear leaves; and the spring its cold winds and its weeping skies. In the life of any one the bright portion is but small, and he must have his share of dangers and sorrows as well as the rest. They will be lighter if you share them, and if he shares yours.—Let us go forward on our way, however. Will you mount one of these horses, Baron, or walk by the lady's side?—Oh, walk, will you? Then follow the onward path. We will come on some hundred yards behind, near enough to guard you, but not to interrupt."

Bernard de Rohan and the lady proceeded on their way. Nor did they fail to take advantage of the moments thus afforded for conversing alone, though no one in such circumstances does take sufficient advantage of the moments. Our minds are so full of thoughts, our hearts so full of feelings, that they crowd and confuse each other in seeking to make their way forth. But a small part is ever spoken of that which might be spoken; and had the time of their journey been more than doubled, there would still have been questions to ask, and plans to arrange, and hopes and wishes and fears to express; and Love, too, would have had a world to tell and to hear; and many a caress would have remained to be given, and many a vow would yet have required to be renewed.

Thus, when at length, after advancing for nearly two hours, several distant lights were seen upon the side of a dark hill beyond, as if issuing from the windows of some building, they found that they had not said half that they might have said, and wished that the minutes could come over again. It is not, indeed, in such circumstances alone that man casts away opportunities. It is all his life long, and every moment of his life. Those opportunities are like the beautiful wild

flowers that blossom in every meadow and in every hedge, while, heedless or careless, unseeing or unknowing, man passes them by continually, or walks upon his way, and tramples them under his feet.

When they reached that spot, however, and the castle of Masseran was before their eyes, the Brigand came up at a quick pace, saying, "Let us pause a moment, and see whether our companions have arrived before us. It might be dangerous for his deliverers to come too near the Lord of Masseran's gates without sufficient numbers."

As he thus spoke, he put the peculiar whistle which he carried to his lips, producing a lower sound than before, but sufficiently loud to be heard around, and call forth many an answer up to the very gates of the castle itself.

"They are here," continued the Brigand, "and the good lord is in his hold. Now, lady, you have doubtless promised things which you may find it difficult to perform. You have promised to see this noble cavalier, and give him—if needs must be, by stealth—the happiness of your presence; but I know better than you do how things will befal you. You will be watched; you will never be suffered to leave that castle's gates without a train, which will cut you off from speaking with any one. The gardens of the castle, however, will doubtless be free, for the walls are high, the gates securely locked, and the way up to them watched. Nevertheless, there is the small postern in the corner of the lowest terrace, hid by a tall yew tree: lay your hand upon the handle of the lock at any time of the day you please. If it open not at the first trial, wait a moment, and try it again. You shall never try it three times without finding that door give way to your hand."

"But he tells me," said the lady, speaking more directly to what was passing in the Brigand's thoughts than to what he actually expressed—"but he tells me that he is actually on his way to visit my mother's husband, charged with messages of import to him from the noble Marquis of Brissac, and that to-morrow morning he will be there, openly demanding admittance."

"See him in the evening also, lady, whatever befal," replied the other. "There are more dangers round you than you wot of.—But I will speak to him farther as we return. Now you had better go on."

A few minutes more brought them nearly to the gates of the castle. The Brigand had remained behind to wait the coming up of his people. Bernard de Rohan turned to see if they were approaching; but he could now perceive no

one upon the road but a single figure coming slowly on at some distance, and leading a horse by the bridle. It was a moment not to be lost. Once more he threw his arms round the lady beside him, and she bent her head till their lips met. There were no farther words between them but a few unconnected names of tenderness, and in a minute or two after they were joined by the wounded servant, who had remained behind with the lady and those who accompanied her when the Lord of Masseran and the rest were sent on.

"Ah! my lord," he said, looking wistfully in the face of the young cavalier, "you have forgotten me, but I have not forgotten you; and if it had not been for my love and duty to my young mistress, I would have been with you in Italy long ago, especially when the Countess sold herself to her stranger husband."

"No, indeed, Henriot, I have not forgotten you," replied Bernard de Rohan; "and I beseech you, for love of me as well as your young mistress, stay with her still, and be ever near her. I much doubt this Lord of Masseran, and have heard no little evil of him. She may want help in moments of need, and none can give her better aid than yourself; but I fear you have been much hurt," he added, "for you walk feebly even now."

"It will soon pass, my lord," replied the man; "but I see a light at the gate: we had better go on quickly, if, as I judge, you would not be recognised."

Bernard de Rohan took one more embrace, and then parted with her he loved. He paused upon the road till, by the light which still shone from the gate of the castle, he saw her and her follower enter and disappear beneath the low-browed arch. He then turned away, and retrod his steps along the side of the hill. He was left to do so for some way in solitude, though he doubted not that the hill-side and the valley below him were both much more replete with human life than they seemed to be. At the distance of little more than half a mile from the castle, he was forced to pause, for the moon had now sunk behind the mountain, and there were two roads, one branching to either hand.

"Keep to the right," said a deep voice near him, as he stopped to choose his path; and the next moment the Brigand, coming forth from the bushes amongst which he had been sitting, walked on upon his way beside him.

"Ours is a busy life, you see," he said; "but yet it is not every night that we have so much business to do as we have had lately."

"Nor, I should think," replied Bernard de Rohan, "is it

every night that you have upon your hands business which can leave so much satisfaction behind."

"I know not," answered the Brigand, "and yet in some sort what you say is true. For I have had pleasure in what I have done—I have had pleasure in serving that bright lady—why, it matters not: I have had pleasure in serving you—why, it matters not: I have had pleasure in frustrating a base and villanous scheme—why, it matters not. But you must not think, Baron, that in the ordinary business of my every-day life there are any of those weak thoughts about me which poison its enjoyments and make the memory of each day bitter. You and I are different beings, born for a different course."

"We are both men," said Bernard de Rohan.

"Ay!" answered the Brigand—"and so are the dove and falcon both birds. As well might that dove think that the life of the falcon must be miserable, because it is a bird of prey, as you judge of my feelings by your own. I am a bird of prey—I am the brother of the eagle on the rock. Our joys and our pursuits are the same; and they leave no more regret with me than they do with that eagle, when he folds his wings in his eyrie, after the day's chase is done."

The comparison was one which, as Bernard de Rohan very well understood, was pleasant and satisfactory to his companion's feelings, but he could not admit its justice to any great extent. He cared not to point out, however, where it failed, and merely replied, "But there is a difference between men and brutes. Man has his reason to guide him, and must be governed by laws. The eagle has no law but the instinct which God has given him."

"Is not God's law the best?" exclaimed the Brigand. "God gave the eagle his law, and therefore that law is right. It is because man's law is not God's law that I stand here upon the mountain. Were laws equal and just, there would be few found to resist them. While they are unequal and unjust, the poor-hearted may submit and tremble; the powerless may yield and suffer: the bold, the free, the strong, and the determined fall back upon the law of God, and wage war against the injustice of man. If you and I, Baron," he continued, growing excited with the heat of his argument, "if you and I were to stand before a court of human justice, as it is called, pleading the same cause, accused of the same acts, would our trial be the same, our sentence, our punishment? No! all would be different; and why? Because you are Bernard de Rohan, a wealthy baron of the land, and I am none. A name would make the difference. A mere name would bring the sword on my head and leave yours

unwounded. If so it be, I say—if such be the world's equity, I set up a retribution for myself. I raise a kingdom in the passes of these mountains—a kingdom where all the privileges of earth are reversed. Here, under my law, the noble, and the rich, and the proud are those that must bow down and suffer; the poor, and the humble, and the good, those that have protection and immunity. Go ask in the peasant's cottage: visit the good pastor's fireside: inquire of the shepherd of the mountain, or the farmer on the plains. Go ask them, I say, if under the sword of Corse de Leon they lose a sheep from their flock, or a sheaf from their field. Go ask them if, when the tyrant of the castle—the lawless tyrant, or the tyrant of the city—the lawful tyrant, plunders their property, insults their lowliness, grinds the face of the poor, or wrings the heart of the meek, ask them, I say, if there is not retribution to be found in the midnight court of Corse de Leon, if there is not punishment and justice poured forth even upon the privileged heads above."

Bernard de Rohan felt that it would be useless to argue with him; for it was evident that he was not one of those who are doubtful or wavering in the course they pursue. There was some truth, too, in what the man said: truth which Bernard de Rohan ventured to admit to his own heart, even in that age, when such sentiments could only be looked upon as treasonable. He was silent, then, considering how to reply, when the Brigand himself went on.

"Think not," he continued, "that I have chosen my part without deep thought. There are some—and perhaps you think me one of them—who are driven by circumstances, led by their passions, or their follies, or their vices, to a state of opposition with the rest of mankind, and who then, when cast out from society, find a thousand specious reasons for warring against it. But such is not my case. Ever since my youth have such things been dwelling in my mind. I had pondered them long. I had fully made up my mind as to what was right and what was wrong, years before injustice and iniquity—years before the insolence of privileged tyranny drove me forth to practise what I had long proposed. Here I exercise the right that is in man. I take the brown game upon the mountain, which is mine as much as that of any noble in the land. I pay no tax to king or to collector. There is no duty on the wine I drink. There is no toll upon the roads I follow. You will say that I do more than this, that I take from others what is not mine and what is theirs; but I have told you why I do so. They have taken from me what was not theirs; and I wage war against a world which

first waged war against me—in which, even amongst themselves, the hand of every one is against his brother—in which, whether it be in camp, or court, or city, or mart, or church, injustice and iniquity are striving to snatch from one another the rod of oppression, and keep the humble beneath their own yoke."

"I cannot think," replied Bernard de Rohan, willing to answer as generally as possible, "I cannot think that the state of society is so terrible as you represent it. There may be occasional instances of corruption and oppression, and doubtless there are. I have seen some myself, and endeavoured to prevent them, but still these things are by no means general."

"Not general!" exclaimed the Brigand, turning upon him, almost fiercely—"Sir Baron, I say they are universal. There are one or two exceptions, it is true. You are one of those exceptions yourself. You are one of those who deserve to be convinced; and I can convince you. I can show you men who pretend to be holy, and humble, and good, oppressing most basely those who are in their power. I can show you tyranny and injustice at every step and in every station throughout the earth, from the tradesman's shop to the monarch's throne. I can show it to you in every garb and in every profession, and in every place. I can—ay, and will show it to you, within these twelve months, in such forms of cruelty and blood that you shall say the brigand on the hillside is mild, compared with the man of courts, or the man of refectories; that he may be an eagle, but that these are vultures."

"I see not," replied Bernard de Rohan, with a smile, "I see not how you can show me all this. You forget that we shall most likely part here in Savoy. That as soon as I can rescue Mademoiselle de Brienne from the situation in which she is placed, I shall hasten onward to my own country, and we shall most likely never meet again."

"Not so, not so!" replied the Brigand. "We shall meet again. Either with her or without her you must, as you say, go thither soon. My steps are bound likewise towards France; for think not that I dwell always here, or appear always thus: were it so, my head would soon be over the gate of Chambery. I will find means to show you a part of what I have said—perhaps to give you some assistance likewise, when you most need and least expect it. But remember," he added, "if misfortunes should befal me, or danger threaten me, it is a part of our compact that you do not

strive to give me any aid; that you neither raise your voice nor your arm in my behalf."

"Nay, nay," replied Bernard de Rohan, "I cannot promise that. I must ever remember the generous assistance you have afforded me this night, and must do my best to prove that I am grateful for it."

"The best way of proving that," replied the Brigand, "is by doing what I ask you. You are held wise for a young man: now ask yourself, if you can judge so well of what is for my advantage as I can judge myself. I tell you, that I have many means of deliverance which you know nothing of; and therefore any attempt to aid me, without my asking you, might ruin me and ruin yourself likewise."

"If you will ask me," replied Bernard de Rohan, "when aid can be serviceable to you, I shall be contented."

"I will, I will!" answered the Brigand. "And now tell me: what have you arranged with fair Isabel of Brienne? for I take an interest in your fate and hers."

"You seem, indeed, to do so," replied the young cavalier; "and yet I know not why it should be so, for I cannot remember that we ever met before."

"Once," replied the Brigand, "only once. Several years ago we were side by side, but for a moment. You and I, and that fair girl, and her brother—her brother, the young Count Henry, who is now in Paris. It was but for a moment; but that moment was one by me never to be forgotten."

"I cannot recal it," replied Bernard de Rohan. "It is strange, too, if it was a moment of such importance. But you say that her brother is in Paris: I wrote to Henry to meet me in Grenoble, and I think he must be there by this time."

"Oh! he is in Paris still," replied the other. "He is a good youth; but he is weak and young—ay, younger than his years. He will be easily persuaded to stay in Paris, and flutter in bright silks, and flaunt at tournaments, run at the ring, or fence at Moors' heads upon a turning pole. He is at Paris still, depend upon it; and if you count upon his coming ere you claim the lady's hand, you must seek him in the capital, and bring him with you."

"I shall demand her hand at once," replied Bernard de Rohan; "but we doubt that there will be opposition from one who has no right to make it; and to bear down that opposition Henry de Brienne must be with me. He is the guardian of his father's promise solemnly given to me before

I first went to Italy. But I will write to him as soon as day breaks to-morrow. Hark! do you not hear voices coming up the pass?"

"Most likely your servants and the priest," replied the Brigand.

"I wonder they have not joined us before," replied Bernard de Rohan. "We should have fared ill if their assistance had been all we had to trust to."

"They could not do better," replied the Brigand. "The other party had caught a sight of us when you stood to argue with me at the corner of the rock, and they broke down the little wooden bridge behind them. Your servants know none of the paths, the priest knows not that which we took, so doubtless by this time they think that we are hewed into mincemeat. However, remember, at that spot, by the broken bridge, a loud halloo, a blast of your horn, or a whistle thrice repeated, will at any time bring some one to you who can lead you to me should you want assistance.—Now, jolly priest, now," he added, raising his voice, "here we are safe, though no great thanks to you."

"If you are safe, and sound, and sober," said the priest, coming up with the attendants of Bernard de Rohan, "it is more than I expected; for we could not reach you for our lives; and as we were scrambling over the hills, and each losing his way according to his fancy, we heard as much noise as at a boor's wedding, though the concert was somewhat different. But now let us hasten back as fast as possible: why, we are a league and a half from the inn, and I shall be so hoarse with shouting and the night air that I shall not be able to sing matins."

CHAPTER V.

The Count de Meyrand was awake early, and dressed with the most scrupulous exactness of appearance, without a riband tumbled, or a point out of place. He descended slowly about seven of the clock from the chamber in which he had passed the night, by the long black double-railed staircase, that led at once from the rooms above into the kitchen, which, as I have said before, served also as the saloon of the inn. His hair and his countenance bore the same appearance of indifference which they usually displayed, and he made no inquiry whatsoever regarding the events of the preceding evening, although he had retired to rest more

than an hour before Bernard de Rohan had returned to the inn. His servants came and went, seeking directions concerning this thing and that, and communicating with him, from time to time, in a low tone. The aubergiste, with many a lowly reverence, asked his distinguished guest manifold questions concerning his breakfast; but still the Count de Meyrand was not heard to ask any questions either regarding the fate of his friend, or the somewhat remarkable events which had lately taken place.

At length, however, the jovial priest made his appearance; and whether it was that the Count was in a better humour for raillery than on the night before, or whether he remarked, by the keen twinkling of the other's eye, that he was about to commence an attack upon him, which would not easily cease, he chose to be the first to open the encounter, saying, "Well, good father, though I know it is not an easy thing to cool a priest's courage, yet I trust your last night's expedition has rather diminished your chivalrous ardour."

"Not a whit," replied the priest. "Everything depends upon how much a man's courage wants cooling. Yours, noble Count, seems not of a quality very likely to boil over; and doubtless ten steps from the door of the inn would have sent you home shivering, Mine carried me, however, a little further."

"Ay, doubtless," interrupted the Count, "up to the point where you met with these rogues; and then you waited behind a great stone to see who would have the best of the fray. Is it not so? I see you have brought home no desperate wounds with you."

"None," replied the priest, "that I cannot bear as tranquilly and well as you, my noble lord, could bear the sorrow of your best friend. My trade, however, is not bloodshed; I love not hard blows, and shall always keep out of their way as far as I can. So my confession is made; but here comes one who has a greater liking for wounds and bruises than I have; and now Heaven send us all as good food as I have a good stomach. Mine host! mine host! that omelet will be overdone, and the sin of burnt eggs is one to which I refuse absolution.—By Hercules! as the Romans used to say—Body of Bacchus! as the Italians say—Dame! as we say in France, did ever mortal man see such a basket of fine trout? Why it is a gift for an abbot! Look! my noble Baron, look!" he continued, turning to Bernard de Rohan, who now made his appearance, "did you ever see such fair river gods in your life? Put them upon the ashes, host, put them upon the ashes!"

157157

Bernard de Rohan did not pay so much attention to the fishes as the priest, by his commendation, seemed to think they deserved; but, turning to his friend, he shook him by the hand, saying, "Well, Meyrand, you certainly always were a very unaccountable sort of personage, or I should be inclined seriously to quarrel with you for suffering me to go last night without assistance, at the imminent risk of getting my throat cut for want of your help."

"If you risked getting your throat cut, De Rohan," replied his companion, "that was your fault; I had nothing to do with that; I even deviated so far from my usual habits as to ask you to stay, and not do it. I have always a reason for everything I do, good Sir Bernard, and I take it for granted that other people have a reason too. I supposed that you had some motive for going and getting your throat cut, and therefore did not in the least blame you for doing so if you chose; but I had no reason for anything of the kind, and therefore I stayed where I was. Indeed, I had every reason in the world not to go; I was warm and comfortable, and had good wine and good viands before me; I was tired with a long day's hunting, and had got my boots off. Then what to me was the Lord of Masseran, that I should try to save his life or liberty? I had no motive for serving him: indeed, quite the contrary. Every one knows him to be an egregious scoundrel, and at this very moment he owes me thirty thousand crowns, which he will never pay; and which I have no chance of getting, unless some honest brigand should cut his throat, when the King of France would doubtless take possession of his lands, and pay his creditors."

"Good faith, you are better acquainted with him than I am," replied Bernard de Rohan. "Pray let me know something of his history; for I never heard anything of him till some six months ago, when letters from France informed me that the widowed Countess of Brienne, the mother of my friend and comrade, Henry of Brienne, was about to be married to a Marquis of Masseran."

"Oh! his history is told in a few words," replied the Count de Meyrand, laughing; "but serve the breakfast, my good host, and do not stand with your mouth open listening to the venerable character of your noble lord, for I take it we are here upon his domain."

"No, no!" replied the host, "he is no lord of mine, noble sir; this is ducal domain we stand upon."

"It matters not," answered the Count: "this Lord of Masseran, then, Bernard, though his mother was a Frenchwoman, was born on the other side of those Alps, a Piedmontese

vagabond; half Frenchman, half Italian;—a sort of water snake, neither adder nor eel; though a sort of third-size sovereign, an underling of the Duke of Savoy. He who would have been beggarly for a French gentleman, was ten times more beggarly for a prince; and thus in all probability he would have gone on living—filled with all the small Italian vices of our day; sharing, it is said, with the brigands who take refuge on the territories of such small lords; and employing the stiletto or the drug when it suited his purpose to get rid of troublesome friends;—thus, I say, he would have gone on living what is considered in Italy a very respectable, quiet, insignificant life, had a fancy not suddenly come into the head of our worthy king to take possession of the dominions of his friend and cousin, the Duke of Savoy; which fancy at once raises this Lord of Masseran into a person of importance. He has, it seems, upon his lands one or two small towns, and one or two small castles; but these towns and these castles are so situated as to command several passes and defiles valuable to France. Now, my Lord of Masseran is a conscientious man, and of course nothing would ever induce him to take part with any one who could not pay him for the same. From the poor Duke of Savoy, not a livre tournois was to be expected. The King of France himself, though a perfect Crœsus in promises, was known to be somewhat threadbare in the treasury. He, however, was the more hopeful speculation of the two, for he had power if he had not money, and there was a probability of his paying one friend out of what he pillaged from another. With him, then, my Lord of Masseran chose to deal, and promised to give free passage to the troops of France upon certain conditions, which are of course a secret. One thing, however, is evident: my Lord of Masseran did with the King as some of our followers do when they take service of us. He asked, in short, for something in hand. Now the worthy monarch of France had nothing to give but the hand of a fair widow in her fortieth year. With that hand, however, went a dowry of some twenty thousand crowns a year, and the Lord of Masseran came to Paris and opened the campaign against the widow's heart. She has the repute, as you should know better than any one, of being somewhat hard and stern in her purposes, and cutting with her tongue. She was inconsolable, too, for the death of her noble husband; always wore black, like the mother of the late king, and looked the picture of widowhood. My Lord of Masseran, however, with his Piedmontese eloquence, found means to win the widow, with the support of the king. The lady thought, it would seem, to

spend her days in Paris, but that city soon became a residence unsuited to the health of her new husband. There were strange stories current regarding him; but there was one thing certain, namely, that he was marvellously fond of those small, square, spotted pieces of mischief, which have the art of conveying so many fortunes from hand to hand. He played largely; he won generally; and his fortune seemed immense. One night, at the Louvre, he borrowed from me the large sum I have named, with a promise to repay it the next morning; but it would seem that, after I left the hall, either fortune went against him, or he took an irresistible longing for Savoy. His lady raged and raved, we were told; but she found that she had now to do with one, upon whose dull ear the sweet sounds of a woman's tongue, raised to ever so high a pitch, had no effect. The Lord of Masseran paid not the least attention to anything that she said; he did not even seem to hear her, but with the most kind courtesy and ceremonious respect handed her to the carriage which was prepared to bear her away; and she found herself on the road to Savoy, before she could arrange any scheme for resistance. This is his history; mine is soon told; I choose not so easily to abandon my hold of my Lord of Masseran; and I am here hunting his game, riding through his woods, and visiting his castle gate; for he seems to me to be as deaf to my sweet solicitations for repayment, as he showed himself to the melodious intonations of his lady's voice.—Now, priest, though your clerical appetite may be good, do not devour all the trout in the dish, for I am hungry as well as you, and have told a long story."

"And a good one, too," replied the priest, laughing, and putting over the dish to the Count; but he suddenly added, "Have you never got within the gates of his castle, then, my noble lord?" and he fixed his eyes full upon the face of the Count de Meyrand.

A very slight change of colour took place on the Count's cheek; but he replied at once, "Oh, yes, I have been within, but to no purpose."

"He must be an obdurate man, indeed," said the priest, "if your persuasions, my noble lord, can have no effect upon him. I wonder what mine would have! Perhaps he might listen to the voice of the church; I will go up and try."

"Why, what hast thou to do with him?" demanded the Count, suddenly turning his eyes sharply upon the priest. "On what pretext wilt thou go thither?"

"To exercise my calling," replied the priest, with a sly smile—"to exercise my calling in one of its various ways."

"I knew not that your calling had various ways," replied the Count, his usual air of indifference verging into a look of supercilious contempt.

"Oh, yes, it has," replied the priest, well pleased, as it seemed to Bernard de Rohan, that he had piqued the Count out of his apathy. "Our calling has various ways of exercising itself. We address ourselves to all grades and classes. If I convert not the Lord of Masseran, I may convert his cook, you know. My efforts for the good of his soul may prove for the good of my own body; and the discourse that is held over venison and capons comes with a fervour and an unction which is marvellously convincing."

There was a sly jocular smile upon the priest's countenance, especially while addressing the Count de Meyrand, that somewhat puzzled Bernard de Rohan, and evidently annoyed the Count himself. It was not difficult to perceive that, in the most serious things he said—though, indeed, there were few that he did say which were serious at all—there was a lurking jest, that seemed pointed at something which the hearer did not clearly see, but which might, or might not, be something in his own character, purposes, or pursuits.

The significance of his tone towards the Count de Meyrand, however, did not pass without that gentleman's observation; and after listening to him for several minutes more, while the party concluded their breakfast, he turned towards him as he rose, saying, "It seems to me, priest, that you would fain be insolent. Now, let me tell you, that though you are very reverend personages in Savoy, and men meddle with you warily, in France we have a way of curing clerical insolence, which is a good scourging with hunting whips. Perhaps you do not know that this is the way French gentlemen treat those who are insolent."

"I know it well," replied the priest, turning upon him sharply—"I know it well, as I happen to be a French gentleman myself."

He instantly changed his tone, however, and added, with his wonted smile, "Nay, but now, Heaven forbid that I should be insolent to the noble Count de Meyrand! He, being a generous and well-bred gentleman, and, like every other gentleman, indifferent to all things upon earth, can never take offence, where no offence is meant; but as he looks furious, I will take myself out of harm's way. The blessing of a whole skin is great. Adieu, my son! adieu! we shall meet some time again, when I shall find you, I trust, restored to temper, and as lamb-like and meek as myself."

While he thus spoke, the priest gradually made his way to the door, and issued forth; while the Count of Meyrand, calling one of his attendants to him, whispered something, which Bernard de Rohan construed into an order unfavourable to the safety of the jovial priest's shoulders.

"Nay, nay, Meyrand," he said, "let him have his jest, for pity's sake. Recollect, he is a priest."

"His gown sha'n't save him!" replied the Count. "Those priests have too much immunity already in all parts of the world. But what do you now, De Rohan? will you hunt with me to-day, and we will drive this Lord of Masseran's deer from one end of Savoy to the other? or do you go on to Paris at once, and deny me your good company?"

"I write to Paris," replied the cavalier, "and send off a messenger immediately. But I myself go up to seek this Lord of Masseran. I have despatches for him from the Maréchal de Brissac, and also some orders to give by word of mouth."

"I hope they are not disagreeable orders," replied the Count, turning towards the door of the inn; "for he is not one of those whom I should like to offend in his own castle."

"Oh, no, I shall say nothing that should offend him," replied Bernard de Rohan. "But, besides that, I shall not go till after the arrival of the rest of my men, who come across the mountain this morning; and he might find it rather dangerous to do me harm."

"His ways of dealing with troublesome friends are various," replied the Count. "I should love neither to dine nor to sleep in his dwelling.—A word to the wise, good friend, a word to the wise!—Now, my men, quick! quick! get ready the horses, bring out the dogs!—You will not be tempted, De Rohan?"

"I cannot, now," replied his friend. "Another day, if I stay so long.—I wish you sport—I wish you good sport;" and, turning towards his chamber, he caused a table to be brought, and materials for writing to be placed before him. He there remained for nearly an hour and a half, busily tracing upon paper those small black characters which since some man—whether Cadmus, who, if he did it, may well be said to have sown dragons' teeth, and reaped a harvest of strife, or whoever else the learned world may have it—those black characters, I say, which since some man, not contented with what mischief the tongue can do, invented writing for the propagation thereof, have worked more of woe and mischief, as well as of happiness and prosperity, than any other invention that the prolific mind of man ever brought forth.

At length the sound of a trumpet coming down the hill saluted his ear, and, in a few minutes after, it was announced to him that the rest of his train had arrived.

CHAPTER VI.

We must now conduct the reader at once to the entrance of the castle of Masseran. The gate itself was shut, though the drawbridge was down and the portcullis was up. There was a little wicket, indeed, left ajar, showing the long dark perspective of the heavy archway under the gate tower, gloomy and prison-like, and the large square court beyond, with its white stones glistening in the sun; while the grey walls of the castle and part of a window, as well as the door of the keep, appeared at the opposite side. On either side, under the archway, but scarcely to be seen in its gloomy shadow, was a long bench, and on the left hand a low door leading up to the apartments in the gate tower. The right-hand bench was occupied by one of the soldiers of the place, and at the door was the warder's wife talking to him, while our friend, the jovial priest, who had escaped without harm or hinderance, notwithstanding the threats of the Count de Meyrand, was waiting at the wicket, from time to time looking through into the court, and from time to time turning round and gazing upon the mountains, humming an air, which was certainly not a canticle.

After a pause of some ten or fifteen minutes, the warder himself appeared, a heavy man, past the middle age, and dressed in rusty grey. "He wont see you, Father Willand," he said. "He's walking in the inner court, and in a dangerous sort of mood. I would rather not be the man to cross him now."

"Poh! nonsense!" replied Father Willand, laughing. "Go in again to him, good warder: tell him I have business of importance with him, and I know that this refusal is only one of his sweet jokes. He will see me, soft-hearted gentleman! Go and tell him—go and tell him, warder!"

"Faith, not I!" replied the warder. "That business of last night seems to have galled him sorely, and he is just in the humour to fire a man out of a culverin, as we know his father once did; but in these days it wont do—culverins make too loud a report, you know.—I will not go near him again."

"Then I will go myself," replied the priest. "He wont

hurt me.—Nay, warder, you would not squeeze the church in the wicket gateway! By Heaven—or as I should say less profanely, by the blessed rood—if you pinch my stomach one moment more, you will pinch forth an anathema, which will leave you but a poor creature all your life."

"Well, be it on your head!" cried the warder, with a grim smile, "though a two-inch cudgel, or a fall from the battlements, is the best thing to be hoped for you."

The priest was not to be deterred, however; and making his way onward, he crossed the outer court, turned to the right, and, passing through a long stone passage, feeling damp and chilly after the bright sunshine, he entered a colonnade, or sort of cloister, which surrounded the inner court. It was a large open space of ground, with tall buildings overshadowing it on all sides. The sun seldom reached it; and there was a coldness and a stillness about its aspect altogether—its grey stones, its few small windows, its low arched cloisters, its sunless air, and the want of even the keen activity of the mountain wind—which made most people shudder when they entered it.

But there was nothing the least chilly in the nature of Father Willand. His heart was not easily depressed, his spirits not easily damped; and when he entered the cloister, and saw the Lord of Masseran walking up and down in the court, an irresistible inclination to laugh seized him, notwithstanding all the warder had said of his lord's mood at that moment.

It is true—although from the description of the worthy officer of bolts and bars one would have expected to see the Lord of Masseran acting some wild scene of passion—he was, on the contrary, walking calmly and slowly backwards and forwards across the court, with his eyes bent on the ground, indeed, but with his countenance perfectly tranquil. It was nothing in his demeanour, however, that gave the priest a desire to laugh, for he was very well aware that the passions of the Lord of Masseran did not take the same appearances as those of other men, and he saw clearly that he was at that moment in a state of sullen fury, which might very likely have conducted any other man to some absurd excess. His personal appearance, also, had nothing in it to excite mirth in any degree. He was a tall, thin, graceful-looking man of the middle age, with a nose slightly aquiline, eyes calm and mild, lips somewhat thin and pale, and a complexion, very common in the northern part of Italy, of a sort of clear pale olive. His dress was handsome, but not ostentatious; and, on the whole, he looked very much the noble-

man and the man of the world of those times. The priest, however, laughed when he saw him; and though he tried to smother it under the merry affectation of a cough, yet the effects were too evident upon his countenance to escape the eye of the Lord of Masseran as he approached.

"Ha! Father Willand," said the Marquis, as their eyes met—"I told the warder to say that I did not wish to see you to-day."

"Ah, but my excellent good lord," replied the priest, bowing his head low, with an air of mock humility and reverence, "it was I who wanted to see your lordship; so I e'en ventured to make my way in, though the warder—foul fall the villain—has so squeezed my stomach in the wicket, that, like a bruised tin pot, it will never again hold so much as it did before."

"You are somewhat of a bold man," said the Marquis, with a cold, bitter, sidelong look at the priest—"you are somewhat of a bold man, to make your way in here, when I bid you stay out. You may come in once too often, Father Willand."

"Heaven forbid, my lord," replied the priest: "I shall never think it too often to serve your lordship, even though it should be at your funeral—a sad duty that, my lord, which we must perform very often for our best friends."

"I should imagine, priest," replied the Marquis, somewhat sternly, "you would laugh at the funeral of your best friends."

"I will promise your lordship one thing," replied the priest, "to laugh at my own, if death will but let me. But surely, my lord, this is a time for merriment and gaiety! Why, I came to congratulate your lordship upon your escape from those who attacked you last night—Ugh! ugh! ugh!"

While the priest, unable to restrain himself, thus laughed aloud, the Marquis bit his lip, and eyed him askance, with a look which certainly boded no great good to the merry ecclesiastic. They were at that moment close to a spot where a door opened from one of the masses of building into the cloister, and the Lord of Masseran, raising his voice a little, exclaimed, in a sweet Italian tone, "Geronimo!"

For a moment the priest laughed more heartily than before; but seeing the Marquis about to repeat his call, he recovered himself, and laying his finger on the nobleman's arm, said, "Stay a moment, my lord, stay a moment, before you call him. First, because the sweet youth must not exercise his ministry upon me.—It would make too much noise, you

know, and every one in the valley is aware that I have come hither.—Next, because there are certain friends of mine looking for me at the bottom of the slope, and expecting me within half an hour, so that I cannot enjoy your Geronimo's conversation ——"

"It is in general very short," said the Marquis.

"And, thirdly," continued the priest, "because I have come up to tell you two or three things which require no witnesses. I am here upon a friendly errand, my good lord, and you are such a niggard that you refuse me my laugh. However, I must have it, be it at you, at myself, or at any one else; and now, if you behave well and civilly, I will tell you tidings that you may like well to hear. If you don't want to hear them, I will take myself away again, and then neither priest nor warder is much to blame. Shall I go?"

He spoke seriously now, and the Lord of Masseran replied, in a somewhat more placable tone, a moment's reflection showing him that the priest, in all probability, would not have come thither except upon some important errand:—"No, do not go," he said, "but speak to me, at least, seriously." He looked down upon the ground for a moment, and then added, "You may well think that I am angry, after all that took place last night; for you, who hear everything, have doubtless heard of that also."

As he spoke, he suddenly raised his keen dark eyes to the countenance of the priest, as if inquiring how much he really did know of the matter in question.

"Oh, yes," replied Father Willand, "I do hear everything, my good lord, and I knew all that had happened to you last night before I sat down to my breakfast this morning: I heard of your happy deliverance, too, from the hands of the daring villains who captured you, for which gracious interposition I trust that you will keep a candle burning perpetually before the shrine of Saint Maurice."

The priest spoke in a serious tone, but still there was an expressive grin upon his countenance; and, after pausing for a moment or two more, he added, as the Marquis was about to reply, "You think I am jesting, or that I do not understand what I am talking about, but I know the whole business as well as you do yourself, and somewhat better. I tell you, therefore, that it is a great deliverance that you have met with, though, perhaps, you think it less a deliverance than an interruption."

The priest paused, as if for the Marquis to reply; but the Lord of Masseran was silent also, regarding his companion with a quiet, sly, inquiring air, which perhaps could be

assumed by no other countenance upon earth than that of an Italian. It might be interpreted to say, "You are more in my secrets than I thought. A new bond of fellowship is established between us."

As he remained actually silent, however, the priest went on to say, "What I come to talk to you about is this very matter; for you may chance be outwitted, my good lord, even where you are putting some trust.—But what I have to say," he continued, "had better not be said amongst so many windows and doors."

"Come with me! come with me!" said the Lord of Masseran, and leading the way through the cloisters, he threaded several long and intricate passages, none of them more than dimly lighted, and many of them profoundly dark. He was followed by the priest, who kept his hand in the bosom of his robe, and, if the truth must be said, grasped somewhat firmly the hilt of a dagger, never feeling perfectly sure what was to be the next of the Marquis of Masseran's sweet courtesies. Nothing occurred, however, to interrupt him in his course, and at length the lord of the castle stopped opposite to a doorway, over which a glimmering light found its way. As soon as it was opened, the bright beams of the day rushed in, and the Marquis led the way into a wide garden, which sloped down the side of the hill, and lay between the walls of the castle itself, and an outwork thrown forward to command one of the passes of the mountain. It was walled on all sides, and nothing could be seen beyond it; but in itself it offered a beautiful contrast to the wild scenery round, being cultivated with great care and neatness, and arranged in the Italian style of gardening, which was then very little known in France, where it had been first introduced some years before by Catherine de Medicis. Long and broad terraces, connected together by flights of steps, formed the part of the garden nearest to the château, while below appeared many a formal walk, sheltered even in that mountain scene by rows of tall cypresses and hedges of other evergreen plants.

"Here we can speak undisturbed," said the Marquis, as soon as he had taken a few steps in advance. "Now what is it you have to tell me, priest?"

"Did you ever hear of such a person as Bernard de Rohan?" demanded the priest, fixing his eyes upon the countenance of the Lord of Masseran.

"I have—I have heard of him," replied the Marquis, turning somewhat pale. "What of him? what of him? Is he not still beyond the Alps?"

"He is within a few leagues of your dwelling," answered the priest.

"I thought so, I thought so!" exclaimed the Lord of Masseran, striking his brow with his hand. "But he shall find he has come too soon."

"You must take heed what you do," replied the priest, grinning. "Did you ever hear how the fox vowed vengeance against the lion, and was wroth, and forgot his cunning, and flew at the lion's muzzle, and the lion put his paw upon him, and squeezed the breath out of the poor fox's body?—My very good lord, you do not know that this Bernard de Rohan has men at arms at his back, and despatches to you from the Maréchal de Brissac, which may not be pleasant for you to receive; and, moreover, he is a great friend of a certain Count de Meyrand, and they have been conferring earnestly together both last night and this morning, and the name of the Lord of Masseran was more than once mentioned. So now, my son, you see what is going forward, and must take your measures accordingly."

The wily Piedmontese sunk back into himself as he heard the unpalatable tidings communicated to him. From the few significant words which the priest had spoken, it was evident enough to the Lord of Masseran that by some means or another all the plans and purposes in which he was engaged at the time were nearly as well known to the personage with whom he was then conversing as to himself, and yet he could not bring himself to speak with him freely thereupon. He wanted advice. He wanted assistance. The priest appeared to know more than he said; and to arrive at a certainty upon that point, the Marquis of Masseran now applied himself with all the skill and shrewdness of which he was master; but in good Father Willand he met with more than his match; for, with equal dexterity and shrewdness, the ecclesiastic had resources which the Lord of Masseran himself had not. He could evade a question by a laugh, or a jest, or a figure, or a pun, and never did diplomatist more skilfully turn and double in a conference than he did in his conversation with the Marquis of Masseran.

At length, driven to speak more clearly, the Marquis paused suddenly on the terrace across which they were walking, and, fronting the priest, demanded abruptly and sternly, "Tell me, then—tell me what is this situation in which you say I am placed, which you always allude to and never explain. Tell me this, and tell me how I may meet the danger, or by the powers of heaven and hell you shall never quit this place alive!"

"A pretty and a sweet persuasion!" exclaimed the priest, laughing heartily; "but, my dear son, I am not so easily killed, even if such parricidal thoughts were anything more than a jest. You know not what a tough morsel an old priest is—hard of mastication, for even stronger teeth than yours. Nay, nay, think of tenderer food! In other terms, ask me pleasantly and civilly, my good son, and you may then chance to receive an answer. If you were to kill me forty times over, it would do you no good. My secrets are like the goose's golden eggs—not to be got at by slaughter."

"There is something that you want, priest," replied the Marquis, in the same abrupt tone. "Quick! tell me what it is—if it be anything in reason, you shall have it."

The priest smiled with a meaning look; but thought for a moment or two before he replied: for, to say the truth, he had not, in his own mind, fixed upon that which he was to demand as his recompence. He had, it is true, an object in view, and the chief means of attaining that object was to persuade the Marquis of Masseran that he dealt with him truly and sincerely. Now, he well knew that the mind of the worthy lord was so constituted that it could by no means be brought to conceive that any man dealt honestly with another, unless he had some personal object to gain by so doing, and therefore the priest determined to assign such an object, although he was, in reality, without one. "Well," he said, "well, you shall promise me, most solemnly, first, not to tell any one what I reveal to you; and also, if you find that what I tell you is true, and if the way that I point out to you prove successful, you shall give the priest of the church of Saint John of Bonvoisin a fat buck in August every year when he chooses to send for it: you shall also give him a barrel of wine of your best vintage, and five silver pieces for alms to the poor, and this in perpetuity."

"Fie, now, fie!" replied the Lord of Masseran—"for your own life were quite enough; but in perpetuity, that is more than I can engage for: it is owning your vassalage, good father."

"It must be even so, though," replied the priest; "or you have not my secret. I care not for venison, sinner that I am, it is the good of the church I think of."

"Well! well!" answered the Lord of Masseran, "most disinterested father, I give you my promise; and now be quick, for I expect a visiter full soon, my dealings with whom may depend upon your words: what is it that I should fear?"

"That Adrian, Count of Meyrand," said the priest, "and

Bernard, Baron de Rohan, laying their heads together for their own special purposes——"

"That can never be! that can never be!" cried the Marquis with a scoff. "They both love the same woman. They both seek her. They can as soon unite as oil and water. No, no, that is all vain!" and he turned away with a sneer.

"Suppose," said the priest, smiling in a way that again shook the Marquis of Masseran's feelings of security, "suppose that the one should love her money, and the other herself, and they should agree to settle it thus:—We will prove to the King of France that the Lord of Masseran holds secret communication with the Duke of Savoy and the Emperor Ferdinand. Suppose this were the case, I say, do you think, my son, that there would be any chance of their really proving it? Could the noble Count of Meyrand say boldly that, to his knowledge, the Lord of Masseran conspired secretly with some troops of Savoy to carry off, as if by force, himself, the Lord of Masseran, and Mademoiselle de Brienne, for special purposes of his own, somewhat treasonable towards France, only that the scheme was defeated by an accident? Could Bernard de Rohan say that he had seen the Lord of Masseran in the hands of his captors, going along with no great signs of unwillingness, and showing no great signs of gratitude to those who set him free?"

"Was he there?" exclaimed the Lord of Masseran, eagerly. "What, a youth in a buff coat? By Heaven, his eyes have been haunting me all night. He seemed to look through me."

"The same person," replied the priest, with a low laugh; "and he did see through you, my son. You have been very transparent lately. I ask no questions, but put it to yourself, whether these two gentlemen can say these things to the King of France. Then may not the one say, 'Sire, I love this girl, and have got her father's promise for her hand; here is her brother, too, consents to our marriage: I claim as my reward your good will and approbation.' Then may not the other say, 'Sire, the Lord of Masseran, as I have showed you, betrays your trust. He has fair castles and fortresses, beautiful lands and lordships, vineyards, olive grounds, corn fields: I pray you, in return for having discovered his dealings with the empire, put me in possession of his lands and lordships till your majesty shall think fit to conclude a peace.'"

The Lord of Masseran looked moodily down upon the ground; and, though, to say the truth, he did not yet put great faith in the priest's sincerity, he asked briefly, "Well! what remedy? How is this to be avoided?"

"That," replied the priest, "for certain I cannot tell you; but I can tell you what I would do were you Father Willand and I Marquis of Masseran. I would order horses to be saddled and grooms to be prepared, and by the most silent, secret, and sudden way, I would betake myself to Paris, cast myself at the King's feet, accuse this Count of Meyrand of seeking to corrupt me, tell him that Savoy had offered me bribes, and, failing there, had striven to carry me off. I would do all this, and then ——"

"Hush!" said the Lord of Masseran—"hush!" there is some one coming to seek me: and, leaving the priest, he advanced a few steps towards a servant who now approached from the house. The Marquis asked a question in a low tone, to which the other replied, loud enough for Father Willand to hear—

"He will not come within the gates, sir, but desires to speak with you for a moment without: he says, he is but in his hunting garb, and unfitted to enter your halls."

"How many men has he with him?" demanded the Lord of Masseran.

"No one but a page, my lord, near the gates," replied the man. "The rest I saw gathered together about a mile down the road, on the other side of the valley."

"I will come!" said the Lord of Masseran—"I will come!" and he added, in a lower tone, some words which the priest did not hear, but which he judged had reference to himself, from perceiving the eyes of the speakers turned more than once shrewdly towards him. "I will be back again in a few minutes, good father," the Lord of Masseran continued. "Wait for me, for we have yet much to speak of."

"I will wait, I will wait," replied the priest; "only be not long, my good son; for though I have much to say to you, I have little time to spare."

The Lord of Masseran gave him every assurance that he would return speedily; and then left the garden, followed by the attendant who had summoned him. The priest looked after them, and listened, and being someway connected with the race of that gentleman called in history Fine-ear, he distinctly heard the door by which he and the Marquis had entered the garden locked after the latter had quitted it. "There is another door," he muttered to himself, with a smile, looking towards one of the archways upon the terrace leading to the château.

The next instant, however, there was a sound from that quarter also, as if somebody turned the key there likewise; but the priest continued to smile notwithstanding, and, pro-

ceeding slowly along the terraces, as if merely to amuse himself by a walk, he approached the thick wall of the garden, and stopped at the entrance of one of those little guerites, or watch-towers, with which the whole enclosure was studded from place to place. Up the narrow staircase in the stone he made his way, and then looked carefully out through the loop-hole which was turned towards the chief entrance of the château. No living object, however, was to be seen in the immediate neighbourhood of the castle itself; though, as the attendant had said, about a mile down the road which passed through the valley was a troop of men and horses and dogs gathered together in various listless attitudes, while two large eagles were seen whirling in immense circles high up above the tops of the mountains, upon the lower part of whose tall sides a flock of sheep appeared feeding in peaceful tranquillity.

"I may as well go," said the priest to himself, as he gazed out upon this quiet scene. "I have said all that it is necessary to say, and this sweet lord may not have done all that he may think it necessary to do. I like not his whisperings, so I may as well go."

But as the priest thus murmured to himself, he looked out again in the same direction, when two persons came slowly forth from behind an angle of one of the towers, and taking their way under the garden wall, approached the very spot where Father Willand stood. There was no difficulty in recognising the Lord of Masseran and the Count de Meyrand.

"Now what would I give," murmured the priest to himself, "for one of those famous inventions—those ear trumpets—those sound catchers—which we read about in old histories."

The good priest, however, possessed none such; and though his ears, as we have said, were very sharp—though he thrust his head as far as he could into the loop-hole—though the Count and his companion, thinking that no one observed them, spoke loudly and vehemently—and though they passed directly under the turret where the priest stood—nevertheless the words which he could catch were very few. "Well, my good lord—well!" said the Lord of Masseran; "you blame me without cause. I have done my best, and am as disappointed as you are."

"I do not blame you," replied the other; "I only tell you what must be the result if the plans you have proposed cannot be carried through immediately."

"Not that I have proposed, not that I have proposed," replied the other; "the suggestion was your own."

"Indeed!" said the Count of Meyrand, "this is something new to me. All I know is, that I have got the whole of your

scheme drawn out in your own hand, the names false, indeed, or written in cipher, but for that we will soon find a key. What I asked was this, either that you should pay me the large debt you owe, or that you should give me such assistance in my suit to Mademoiselle de Brienne as would enable me to call her my wife within two months. Those two months have now well nigh expired, and I will be trifled with no more."

The latter part of this sentence was lost to the ear of the priest; but he guessed what it must be; and certainly the slight portion that he had heard gave him a very strong inclination to hear more. He paused, then, to consider whether this could be accomplished by any possible means, but it was evident that such could not be the case; for even while he turned the matter in his mind, the little path, along which the Marquis de Masseran and his companion walked, led them farther and farther from the wall of the garden. We must now, however, follow the two noblemen, and leave the priest to his fate, which we shall very speedily see.

"Well, well, my good friend," replied the Marquis de Masseran, in answer to the last observation of the Count, "the time has not yet fully expired, and it shall be your own fault if my promise is not completely fulfilled."

"How can it be my fault?" said the Count. "I have nothing to do with the fulfilment of your promise."

"Yes you have," answered the Marquis of Masseran: "I will give you the means; but if any pitiful scruple, any lady-like hesitation upon your part, prevents you from employing them, the fault is your own."

"Mark me now, my good lord," replied the Count — "it was understood between us that I was to have no share in anything contrary to my allegiance to the crown of France. With your own plans I had nothing to do. If you chose to give the agents of the Empire an opportunity of making you a prisoner, and taking possession of your fortresses for reasons and with purposes best known to yourself, I had nothing to do with that—that was your own affair; I would be in no degree implicated with it — I would receive no bribes from Savoy or Austria," he continued with a sneer; "all I agreed to do was, to rescue the lady, if on any occasion I were informed that she was travelling as a prisoner between Font Covert and Brianzone. This I promised to do, and I should have had no scruple then to use my opportunities to the best advantage."

The Lord of Masseran smiled with a meaning look, which his companion easily interpreted. The Count added, with a

frown, "You mistake me: I would have done her no wrong, sir! Though I would have taken care to keep her so long with me, that she could give her hand to no one else, I would have treated her with all honour."

"Doubtless, doubtless," replied the Lord of Masseran; "but what I mean now, my lord count, is, that if I again, at a great risk to myself, give you good opportunity, you will have no hesitation in using a little gentle force to compel this lady's union with yourself. We have priests enough who will perform the ceremony with a deaf ear to all the remonstrances that her reluctance and maiden modesty may suggest; but when we have carried the matter so far as that, remember that my safety—nay, my life itself—may be compromised, if you yield to any weak supplications. Once commit ourselves, and our only safety is in her being your wife! Then she will be silent for her own sake."

"By Heavens," said the Count, in a deep low tone, "she shall be my wife, if it be but in revenge for the scorn with which she treated me in Paris. If it costs the lives of her and me, and all our kin, she shall be mine, Lord of Masseran."

"So be it, then," replied the Marquis; "but to accomplish my new scheme, I must be absent some few days."

The Count gazed upon him somewhat suspiciously. "Some few days?" he said. "What! long enough, Marquis, to go to Paris or Vienna?"

"Neither," replied the Marquis of Masseran, coolly. "Three days will suffice, if well used. In three days, I will be back again."

"And in those three days," replied the Count, "this Bernard de Rohan, whom we were talking about just now, will have fair opportunity of visiting the bright lady, and even perhaps, by the connivance of her fair mother, may carry her within the French frontier, and plead her father's promise at the court of the King."

"Not by her mother's connivance," replied the Marquis. "Her mother loves him as little as you do; and even were he at the court of France to-morrow, her protest against the marriage would be sufficient to stop it. But to guard against all danger, and, if possible, to put the mind of a suspicious man at ease, I will tell you that one great cause of my going hence is to prevent this Bernard de Rohan from setting foot within my walls. I know his coming: I know why he comes, far better than you do. I have heard his motives and his views within this hour, from one who is well acquainted with them, and if he present himself at my gates, he will find a stern refusal till I return. Then I must see

him, but I shall then be prepared. Will this satisfy you? If it do so, tell me at once; for it is high time that I should mount my horse, and quit this place without delay."

Though in reality anything but satisfied, the Count de Meyrand expressed his consent to the proposal, determined in his own mind to watch all the proceedings of a confederate whom he could so little trust, even in the dark and tortuous schemes in which their interests were combined. He tried, as he parted from the Marquis, to conceal his doubts, lest they should betray his purposes; but that worthy gentleman was far too practised a reader of the human heart and human countenance to be so deceived; and when they separated, it was with the full conviction that each would endeavour to deceive and circumvent the other, unless some strong necessity continued to bind them together.

"Now," thought the Marquis de Masseran, as he paused for a moment looking after the Count de Meyrand — "now for this priest. I must have more information from him — more full, more complete. — Then what is to be done with him? It might be dangerous to confine him; — and yet it were easy to say that he had held treasonable discourses. — A fall from the walls might be as good as anything—I will speak with Geronimo about it."

He had been standing with his back towards the castle, and his eyes fixed upon the ground while he thus held parley with himself. On the other side of the valley, which was there profound, rose up the mountain, with the road into Piedmont winding along it, at the distance of perhaps a quarter of a mile, to use the ordinary expression, as the crow flies, but fully a mile by the road; and as he ended his murmuring soliloquy, the Marquis of Masseran looked up in that direction. To his utter surprise and consternation when he did so, he beheld the figure of the priest walking quietly along the highway towards the lower ground of Savoy.

He hastened back to the castle: but he was assured at the gates by all the several persons who were standing there, that no one had passed. On examining the doors of the garden, every one of them was found to be closed; and the Marquis of Masseran came to a conclusion which was not pleasant for a man engaged in his peculiar pursuits—namely, that he was deceived and betrayed by some one of his own household.

CHAPTER VII.

The observation may seem trite, that to every period of life is assigned by the Almighty and Munificent Being, who at our creation adapted to each part of our material form the functions that it was to execute, and the labours it was to sustain, either peculiar powers of endurance or counterbalancing feelings, which render the inevitable cares and sorrows apportioned to every epoch of our being lighter and more easy to be borne. The woes of childhood are, in themselves, speedily forgotten. The pains are soon succeeded by pleasures and care; gnawing care, the rack of after-life, is then unknown. Boyhood—eager, enthusiastic, hopeful boyhood—the age of acquisition and expectation, though it may know from time to time a bitter pang, scarcely less in its degree than those that afflict mature life, has so many compensating enjoyments, its own sunshine is so bright, the light that shines upon it from the future is so dazzling, that the griefs serve but as a preparation and a warning, too little remembered when once they are past. Old age, with its decay, with the extinction of earthly hopes, with the prospect of the tomb, has also dulled sensibilities that allow us not to feel many of the more painful things of early years. The blunted edge of appetite may not give so keen a zest to pleasure; but the apathy which accompanies it extends to griefs as well as joys, and if wisely used, is one of the best preparations for a resignation of that state of being which we have tried in the balance of experience and have found wanting — wanting in all that can satisfy a high and ethereal spirit — wanting in all things but its grand purpose of trial for a life to come. But besides all this, unto that period of old age, thus prepared and admonished for another state, God himself has also given comfort and consolation, a promise and a hope — a promise brighter than all the promises of youth — a hope brighter than all those that have withered away upon our path of life.

There is still another age, however, an age the most perilous, often the most full of pains: an age when the eager aspirations of youth reach out the hand towards fruition; when the great truths of disappointment break upon us; when we first learn the bitter lesson that hope has told us idle tales, that fortune is of fickle favour, that friendships are too often false, that our own hearts do ourselves wrong, that enjoy-

ment itself is often a vanity and often a vision; that we must suffer and grieve and repent in the midst of a world which, shortly before, we fancied was composed of nothing but brightness and beauty and happiness. I speak of the time of life when we first put on manhood, and meet all its sorrows at the moment when we expect nothing but its joys. For that period, too, there is a bright compensation given, there is a sustaining principle implanted in our breast, common to the highest and the lowest, the savage and the civilised — a principle that furnishes a balm for many wounds, that surrounds us with an atmosphere of consolation, hope and joy, and enables us to live on in one splendid dream even in the midst of hard and dark realities.

That principle is love; and that principle was warm and strong in the bosom of Bernard de Rohan as, on the day after that in which the conversations we have mentioned in our last chapter took place, he stood, a few minutes before the setting of the sun, under a group of tall fir trees that had pitched themselves upon a pinnacle of the rock, about ten yards distant from the farther angle of the garden, attached to the château of Masseran. The trees grew very close together; and, what between scanty soil and the mountain winds, their large trunks had contorted themselves into manifold strange shapes. From this group, two or three rows of the same kind of firs ran down the side of the hill into the valley. One would have supposed that they were the remains of some old avenue, had the lines been but a little more regular.

The shadow of those trees completely concealed any one who stood beneath them, and the eyes must have been very near that could have perceived Bernard de Rohan as he leaned against one of them, gazing upon a particular part of the garden wall immediately under one of the small watch turrets. He thus waited some time, with an eagerness of expectation, it is true, which in no other situation or circumstances had he ever known before, but at the same time with many sweet thoughts and hopes and happy memories which cheered the moments, and made even the impatience that he felt, appear like some of those drinks which man has invented to satisfy his thirst, and which are at once pungent and grateful to the taste. He had waited some time, we have said, when at length, as a distant snowy peak of the mountain began to change its hue and turn rosy with the rays of the setting sun, the small postern door on which his eyes were fixed was seen to move upon its hinges, and then stood ajar. Bernard de Rohan sprang forward, passed the small open

space in a moment, and pushing back the door more fully, stood within the garden of the castle of Masseran.

Scarce a step from the gate, with her hand pressed upon her heart, as if to stop the palpitation of fear and agitation, stood a lady, perhaps of twenty years of age. She was certainly not more; and her beauty, like the morning sun, seemed to have the promise of a long bright race before it. She was very graceful, and very beautiful. The whole form seemed to breathe of a bright and high spirit; but even had it not been that her person so perfectly harmonised with her mind, and was, in fact — as nature probably intended should always be the case — an earthly type of the soul within, yet Bernard de Rohan would still have loved her as deeply, as tenderly as he did, for he knew that spirit to be bright and beautiful: he knew the heart to be tender, and devoted and affectionate; he knew the mind to be pure and high, and fixed in all its purposes of right.

He had been brought up with her from youth; her father had been his guardian, and a parent to him when his own parents were no more. She had fancied herself a sister to him till the hearts of both told them it was happy she was not so. No disappointments had ever befallen them in the course of their affection; no obstacles had been thrown in their way till that time; and yet, though neither opposed, nor troubled, nor disappointed, they loved each other with true and constant hearts, and feared not the result of any hour of trial.

She was very beautiful, certainly. It was not alone that all the features of her face were fine, but it was also that the form of the face itself was beautiful, and the way that the head was placed upon the neck, and the neck rose from the shoulders, all gave a peculiarity of expression, a grace, which is only to be compared to that of some ancient statue from a master's hand. The eyes, too, were very, very lovely, deep blue, and full of liquid light; with dark black eye-lashes that curtained them, like a dark cloud fringing the edge of the western sky, but leaving a space for the bright light of evening to gush through upon the world. Her complexion was clear warm brown; but now, as she stood, there was something, either in the agitation of the moment, or in the cold light of the hour, which made her look as pale as marble.

She was pressing her hand upon her heart, and leaning slightly forward, with an eager look towards the door, as if prepared to fly should any one appear whom she did not expect. The instant she saw Bernard de Rohan, however, her whole face was lighted up with a glad smile, and she sprang

forward to meet him with the unchecked joy of pure and high affection. They were in a moment in each other's arms.

"My Isabel! my beloved!" he said; "I thought that this man had determined to shut me out from beholding you again."

"And so he would," replied the lady. "So he would, if he had the power. But oh! Bernard, I fear him — I fear him in every way — I fear him on my own account, I fear him on yours."

"Oh! fear not, fear not, Isabel!" replied Bernard de Rohan. "He can but bring evil upon his own head if he attempts to wrong either you or me. Already has he placed himself in danger. But tell me, my beloved, tell me, is he really absent from the castle, or was it but a pretence to avoid seeing me when I came yesterday?"

"No, he is absent," replied Isabel de Brienne. "In that, at least, there is no deception, for I saw him ride out with but a few horses, yesterday towards mid-day. He took the small covered way by the back of the castle, and by the other side of the gardens. I saw him from the window of my chamber in the keep, and I do not believe that he has since returned."

"It must have been to avoid me," said Bernard de Rohan, thoughtfully; "and yet how could he know that I was here? Did he ever hint at such knowledge, my Isabel?"

"Not to me," she answered; "but I have scarcely seen him since that terrible night. I have been in my mother's sick chamber, to which his cruelty and brutality have brought her. Nor would he ever—even if I had seen him—nor would he ever mention your name to me. He would fain have me forget it, Bernard; but on that score I have much to tell you, too."

"I know that I judge your heart right, dear Isabel," replied Bernard de Rohan, "when I say he would find it hard to make you forget that name; and yet I have had warnings within the last two days of many a dark and evil scheme it would seem against your peace and mine. A vague hint has been given me that one whom I know to be brave, and whom the world holds to be honest—one who was once my particular friend and my comrade in many a day of difficulty, and strife, and peril—one who I know must be well aware, from many things that I have casually said in thoughtless freedom of heart, that you and I are linked together by promises that can never be broken—has been labouring hard to supplant me in your affection. Yet I will not believe them, Isabel—I will not believe, in the first place, that you would

hear one word on such a score from any man. Neither will I believe—though he has certainly lingered strangely away from the army, though he has changed, I may say, marvellously, and from a gay, rash, thoughtless youth, become a cautious, calculating, somewhat impenetrable, man—I will not believe that Adrian de Meyrand would do me wrong. No, no, I will trust him still."

"Trust him not, Bernard! trust him not!" replied Isabel. "Trust him not, Bernard! I, at least, know what he is. You say that your Isabel," she continued, gazing on him tenderly, "would not hear one word of love spoken by any other lips than your own. You do her right, dear Bernard. She would not, if she could help it; and even when against her will, against remonstrance and anger, she has been forced to hear such words, she has scarce forgiven herself for what she could not avoid, and has reproached herself for that which was forced upon her. Do you, too, reproach her, Bernard?"

"Oh, no," he replied, holding her to his heart, and gazing into the pure bright eyes which seemed, as they were, deep wells of innocence and truth—"oh, no, dear Isabel, what was done unwillingly needs no reproach; but how was this? Tell me all!—De Meyrand, then, has wronged me?"

"If he knew of your love for me, he has," replied Isabel de Brienne; "but promise me, Bernard, that no rash or hasty act will make me regret having spoken to you openly, and I will tell you all."

"None shall, my Isabel," replied her lover. "It is only dangerous rivals, or insolent ones, that require the sword of a brave man. De Meyrand is not the one, and probably may never be the other. Speak, dear one! I must hear all."

"Well, then," she answered, "before we quitted the court, I remarked that this Count of Meyrand paid me assiduous court; and though, certainly, he was very attentive also to my mother and her new husband, still I avoided him, for there was something in his look and his manner that did not please me. I remarked, however, that many of the nobles of the court—nay, even the King himself—seemed so to smoothe the way and remove all obstacles, that he was frequently near me. One day, he followed me, through the crowded halls of the Louvre, by my mother's side, and when I could not avoid him, poured into my ears a tale of love, which I speedily cut short. I told him, at once, that my heart was given, and my hand plighted to another; and I besought my mother to confirm what I said, and stop all farther importunity. He had fascinated her, Bernard; and though she did

what I requested, it was but coldly. He left me for the time; but the very next day, while I was alone in my mother's chamber, he came in, and pursued the same theme. Then, Bernard, I fear I acted ill. He aroused my anger. I was indignant that he should thus persecute me after what I had said. I treated him with some scorn. I told him, cuttingly, in answer to a question which he should not have asked, that even were I not plighted in faith, and bound by affection to another, I should never have felt for him aught but cold indifference. He lost his temper at length, though it was long ere he would leave me; and as he quitted the room, I could hear something muttered between his teeth which sounded very much like a menace. Since then I have only seen him three times. Once more at the court; but by that time my brother had returned from Italy. He was with me, and the Count did not come near. I have twice seen him here, when I have been forced out by the Lord of Masseran upon the pretence of a hunting party. He comes not near the castle, however, and, when we did meet, he was distant and stately in his manner; but still there was something in his eyes that made me shudder."

"For the last two days he has been in the same small inn with myself," replied Bernard de Rohan. "I will speak to him to-night, my Isabel—calmly and gently, I promise you; but he must learn to yield this suit, if he still entertains it. Nay, look not grieved, dear one. I will keep my promise faithfully, and forgive the past, so he offend not in the future."

"I grieve and apprehend, dear Bernard," she replied; "but think not that I would strive to stay you from any course that you yourself judge right. I know you are moderate and just, and that you will not think, as some might do, that you prove your love for me by fiery haste to expose a life on which hangs all my hopes of happiness. Your honour is to me far more than life; but oh, Bernard, judge but the more calmly, I beseech you, of what that honour requires, by thinking, that not your life and happiness alone are the stake, but mine also. Having told you all truly—as I ever will through life—I must scarce venture a word more to persuade or to dissuade; and yet I cannot think honour can call upon you even to speak angry or reproachful words, when this man himself was not told, by me at least, that it was his friend he was trying to supplant."

Bernard de Rohan's brow was somewhat cloudy, though he smiled. "I fear, my Isabel," he said, "that he knew the fact too well. I can call many a time to my mind, when I

have dropped words concerning you which he could not mistake. However, I have said I will pass over all that is gone, and now let us think of other brighter things."

"I know not," she replied—"I know not why, Bernard, but a dark shadow seems to overhang me, which prevents my thinking of brighter things. Within the last year so much has happened to cause apprehension and anxiety, so much to give birth to pain and grief, that my spirit has sunk; and whereas everything used to seem full of brightness and hope, all is now full of despondency."

"Cheer thee, cheer thee, Isabel," replied Bernard, adding those caresses that cheer far more than words—"I will take thee from the midst of the sad things that must surround thee here. I know, dear Isabel, that thy mother was often harsh, and always cold, and since I and your brother have left you, you have had no support or comfort under the pain which her behaviour must have given."

"Oh, it was not her harshness nor her coldness, Bernard," replied Isabel Brienne; "I could have borne that easily; but when I recollected my dear father—when I remembered all his high and noble qualities—his kindness, his tenderness to her, and saw her again stand at the altar to give her hand to another so unlike him in everything—dark, treacherous, avaricious, and deceitful—it was then I first felt that I really wanted aid and consolation. It was then that I wanted help, I wanted protection and support; and even at that time I would have written to you to come to me with all speed, if it had not been for some foolish feelings of shame."

"They were indeed wrong, my Isabel," replied Bernard; "for surely, Isabel, with our faith plighted by your own father's will, with a long dear intimacy from childhood until now, if you could not repose full unhesitating trust and confidence in me, where, where could you place it, Isabel?"

"I know it was foolish," she replied. "I know it was very foolish, Bernard—but yet, even now"—and she looked down blushing upon the ground—"but yet, even now, the same foolish hesitation makes me scruple to tell you what I firmly believe is the best—nay, is the only plan by which we could hope to avoid the dangers that surround us."

"Nay, Isabel, nay," replied Bernard de Rohan, "after saying so much, you must say more. You must tell me all, freely, candidly. The brightest part of love is its confidence. It is that perfect, that unhesitating reliance, that interchange of every idea and every feeling, that perfect community of all the heart's secrets and the mind's thoughts, which binds two beings together, more closely, more dearly, than the dearest

of human ties—more than the vow of passion, or the oath of the altar. It is that confidence which, did we not deny its sway, would give to earthly love a permanence that we find but seldom in this world. Oh, Isabel, you must not, indeed you must not, have even a thought that is not mine."

"Nor will I, Bernard," she replied; "nor will I; though I may blush to say what I was going to say, I will not hesitate to say it. It is this, then, Bernard: you must take me hence without delay."

"Oh, how gladly," he cried, throwing his arms round her, and kissing the glowing cheek that rested on his shoulder—"oh, how gladly, Isabel! I waited but for the arrival of your brother to propose that step to you myself. If this Lord of Masseran chooses to refuse me admission, I cannot force my way in, and you may be subject to every kind of pain and grief before I receive such authority from the King, or from Brissac, as will force him to give you up."

"That is not all, Bernard, that is not all," replied the lady. "This man is deceitful to all. Suppose but for a moment that, finding the King of France obliged to withdraw his troops from Italy, as I hear has been the case, he resolves to betray the trust that has been reposed in him, to submit himself again to the Duke of Savoy, to receive the troops of the Emperor. Suppose, Bernard, he removes me and my mother beyond the limits of Savoy, beyond the power of the King of our own country, beyond your reach, Bernard, what would be the consequences then? I should be but a mere slave in his hands.—But listen to me still, dear Bernard; there is more, more to be said; I have good reason to believe and know that all these dangers are not merely imaginary; but that he is actually dealing with the Empire. I have seen couriers come and go, and heard them converse long with him in the German tongue. I have seen officers, who spoke neither French nor Italian, surveying the castle, and consulting with him over plans of other fortresses. Twice, also, when I have hesitated to ride forth with him, fearing dangers—I did not well know what—my mother, who is already his complete slave, has held out vague threats to me of removing me to far distant lands, where my obedience would be more prompt and unhesitating. Now, even now, Bernard," she continued, "I believe that he is gone upon some errand of this kind, and it would in no degree surprise me, ere three days are over, to see this place filled with German soldiers."

"Then, dear Isabel," exclaimed Bernard de Rohan, "we must lose no time. I wrote to your brother to meet me at

Grenoble, and I have sent off messengers to him there and at Paris. But we must not wait for his coming. Your father's written consent will justify us, and the King is already aware that this man's faith and adherence to France is insecure. It would have been better, indeed, if your brother had been here, for then he might, in the first place, have openly demanded you at the hands of this man."

"Oh, no, no, Bernard," she replied; "I rejoice greatly that Henry is not here. I feel a sort of terror at the idea of his falling into the hands of this Lord of Masseran. You know that Henry's death would place great wealth at the disposal of my mother; and, though it is dreadful to say, yet I do fear there is no act at which this Italian would hesitate, to obtain wealth or power, or any of the objects for which men strive on earth. I would not for the world that Henry should put himself into the hands of one so treacherous. If Henry be at Grenoble, we can fly to him at once, and be united there."

"Better, far better, dear Isabel," replied her lover, "that we should be united before we go. There is a priest here who seems to have some regard for me, and who lingers still at the inn, I know not why. He will be easily persuaded to unite our hands, as our hearts are already united, and then my right to protect and defend you will bear no denial. Let it be soon, too, my Isabel. Why not to-morrow night?"

She replied not for a moment or two. Not that she hesitated—not that there was a doubt in her own mind of what her answer must be—but yet she paused, with her hand clasped in that of Bernard de Rohan, and her eyes hid upon his shoulder, while he went on to persuade her, though there needed no persuasion.

"Consider, dear Isabel," he said, "the secret of this postern door is one that may be discovered at any time. He might return within a day. If we were to meet often, our meeting might be discovered. What it is necessary to do, it is necessary to do at once."

It need not be said that Bernard de Rohan's entreaties were successful. Isabel promised to be there at the same hour on the following night prepared for flight; and Bernard de Rohan undertook to have the contract of their marriage drawn up by some neighbouring notary, and a priest ready and willing to unite them.

"In four or five hours," he said, "we shall be within the pale of France, and, as you saw the other night, we shall have plenty of willing guards thither, dear Isabel. Besides that wilder retinue, too, my own train is down at the hamlet;

but, of course, I must bring few people with me, for fear of attracting attention. Have you anybody in the castle, dear Isabel, besides good Henriot, who can give you aid and assistance?"

"Oh, yes," replied the lady, "there is the maid who conveyed to you the note to-day. I can trust her."

"She seemed sullen, or stupid," replied Bernard de Rohan: "I could not induce her to utter more than one or two words, and those I did not distinctly hear."

"She is very silent," replied Isabel; "but is not so dull as she looks. Give her but one thing to think of, and one object to attend to, and she will execute what she is directed to do well enough; and, perhaps, it is all the better that she observes nothing which passes round her, and is so sparing of her words."

"Hush!" said Bernard de Rohan. "There is a light upon the terrace, near the castle, and some one seems coming hither. Adieu! dear Isabel, adieu! Though the evening is too dim for them to see us, it is better that I should leave you till to-morrow. But forget not, dear one; and oh! be rather before than after the hour."

Thus saying, he pressed her to his bosom for a moment, and then passed through the postern door. He closed it not entirely, however, for some vague apprehension concerning the sweet girl he had just left behind, caused him to pause and listen, till he assured himself that the person whom he had seen approaching was no unfriendly one. In a few minutes, he heard another female voice saying distinctly to Isabel, "Your lady mother, mademoiselle, desires that you would come and play to her on the lute."

"I come, I come, good Maddelene," replied the voice of Isabel de Brienne; and in the clear evening air Bernard de Rohan could hear the sound of receding footsteps.

CHAPTER VIII.

"HAS not the Count de Meyrand returned?" demanded Bernard de Rohan, as he re-entered the kitchen of the little inn, and saw it tenanted only by one or two of his own attendants, the host and hostess, and a waiting-boy.

"He has not only returned, my lord," replied the landlord, "but has gone away again, and, sorry am I to say,

gone away altogether. He came back, and departed in great haste, paying for all that he had like a prince."

"This is strange," replied Bernard de Rohan. "Did he leave no message for me?"

"No message, my lord," replied the host—"he gave your man, Master Martin, a note for you, however; but he has just gone up the hill and taken the note with him."

"Do you know where the Count has gone to?" demanded the young nobleman.

"Oh, to Pont Beauvoisin, on his way to Paris," the landlord answered: "he has been gone well nigh two hours."

It is a very common piece of policy on the part of hosts, aubergistes, landlords, and others of the same class and character, by whatsoever denomination they may be known, to laud up to the skies the guest just departed, praising in him those especial virtues which they wish to inculcate upon the guest who happens to be their listener. Thus the landlord was proceeding to paint in high colours the generosity and careless liberality of the Count de Meyrand, when some persons speaking, and a loud rich buttery laugh, merry in every tone, announced that the good priest, Father Willand, was approaching the auberge, with some companion.

"We shall live like clerks now he is gone—we shall live like clerks," exclaimed the voice of the priest. "By the holy mass, he was not content with eating more than his own share of everything, but his very look changed everything that he did not eat, and turned it bad. His aspect was so cold that it chilled the pottage; his look so sharp that it turned the wine sour. I will make a new prayer night and morning—May I never again meet such a companion at an inn as this Count de Meyrand."

Bernard de Rohan found, on the entrance of the priest, that it was his own attendant, Martin, with whom Father Willand had been conversing. The attendant immediately produced the Count de Meyrand's note, which his master read attentively, and with an appearance of satisfaction.

"So, my friend De Meyrand has gone on business of importance to Paris," he said, aloud.

"Ay, as the fox is said to go to his hole," replied the priest.

"I dare say, indeed," replied the young cavalier, "that there are many foxes in that hole, my good father; but still your comparison is not a very pleasant one for the good Count."

"The comparison was more aimed at his way of going to

Paris than at either Paris or himself," replied the priest. "I repeat, he is gone to Paris as a fox is said to go to his hole; that is, back-foremost."

"Nay," replied Bernard de Rohan, "I never yet saw fox so stupid. Why should a fox go back-foremost?"

"To hide the way he goes," answered the priest—"to make the footsteps point out of the hole instead of into it. So the good peasants tell one."

"But how can this apply to the Count de Meyrand?" asked Bernard de Rohan, with his curiosity now considerably excited.

"Because he tells you," replied the priest, "that he is going to Paris, and we watched him from the top of the hill, and saw him turn quite the other way before he got two leagues out into the plain."

"Strange enough!" replied Bernard de Rohan, not choosing to appear as much interested as he really was—"strange enough; but he may well have some friends to see—some town to visit in the way.—Come, my good host! come, let us have supper speedily, and give us more light, for the night is growing dark and sombre.—Good priest," he continued, turning to Father Willand, and speaking in a low voice, "I have a word for your private ear by and by—somewhat to consult upon, regarding which I need sound discretion and good counsel. I beseech you, therefore, pause at the end of the first stoup of wine."

"My son, my son!" replied the priest, "men have always made a mistake with regard to the abode of truth. Truth and my brains lie together at the bottom of the second pottle pot, for most men are sure to tell the truth when they get to that pitch; and my brains are never clear, clean, and neat till they have been washed in that quantity at least. Fear not, fear not, I will be careful—though, if you are going to confess yourself, you ought to wish me as drunk as possible, for the penances I enjoin are always light when my knees feel like an unstarched ruff.—Were it not better, however, to talk this matter over first, while my good host prepares the supper, and then we can consider it in our cups, you know?"

"It may, indeed, be as well," replied Bernard de Rohan. "Follow to my chamber, good priest, then.—Go on, Martin, with a light." And, taking his way up the dingy staircase, Bernard de Rohan led the priest to the large square lofty bed-room which had been assigned him as his place of repose, and which no one would have imagined that lowly and humble-looking inn could boast of. The moment the door

was closed and the attendant gone, the priest's eyes assumed a shrewder, but more serious, expression, and he said, "Know you that I have been here twice yesterday, and three times to-day, seeking you?"

"In truth, I did not," replied the young cavalier. "On what account did you seek me?"

"To tell you to make good use of your time," answered the priest. "The Lord of Masseran is absent. He, I doubt not, is really gone to Paris—gone to justify himself to the King against accusations which he hears are to be made against him. You have, therefore, time to do all that you would, and nothing is required but to be diligent, quick, and secret."

"I have been all three," replied Bernard de Rohan. "And I have just come from the postern by the fir trees."

"Then you have seen Corse de Leon," said the priest, abruptly. "When and where? For I could not find him, neither yesterday nor to-day."

"I met him this morning," replied Bernard—"I met him this morning, and took him for an old drover, so completely had he disguised himself."

"Then have you seen the lady also?" asked the priest.

"I have, my good friend," answered the young cavalier, somewhat surprised to find how completely his proceedings were divined. "I have seen the lady; and it is in regard to that interview that I wished to speak with you. May I trust to you to do for me, to-morrow night, one of the offices of your holy function, and——"

"Marry you, in short," replied the priest. "Marry you to this fair Isabel of Brienne. Well, my son, I see no impediment—no harm therein.—If you have well considered the matter," he added, with a laugh, "and have determined to take upon yourself the holy estate of matrimony, far be it from me to prevent you, although I must say, that it was in gracious consideration and providence for our temporal as well as spiritual happiness, that our holy church exacted from us an oath, not to enter into the condition you so much covet; however, I will put the couples round your necks, and then you must run along the road together as you can; but where shall it be?" he continued. "Tell me the whens and the hows, for that is very needful."

Bernard de Rohan explained to him as much as he judged needful. Indeed, what he was obliged to explain, put his plans completely in the power of the priest. Nevertheless, he did not anticipate any evil on that account. All of us—wise and simple alike—are more or less guided in our deal-

ings with our fellow-creatures by various other principles than the dictates of mere reason. The most suspicious man, the most cautious man, will from time to time place confidence where it is least deserved, from some motives to which his judgment would refuse its assent. The calm and deliberate politician, who has frustrated many of the cabinet knaves of Europe, and concealed his thoughts from the penetrating eye of diplomacy, has often betrayed his secret to a pretty face, and sometimes let it fall into possession of a roguish valet.

But Bernard de Rohan was neither a very cautious, nor a very suspicious man. His nature was frank and confiding; and wherever he showed himself reserved, he was rendered so by the effect of reason and deliberate consideration. In the present instance, he was forced to trust the priest; and he trusted him without regret or hesitation: for there was something in good Father Willand's face and demeanour which was frank and kindly, and to say sooth, Bernard de Rohan had conceived a prepossession in his favour, which might or might not be justified. He thought, too, that although his own memory of the good priest's features might have faded in the lapse of many years, and though those features themselves must have been much changed by time since he had seen them—he thought, too, that they were not wholly without some corresponding traces on the tablets of remembrance. Memory has her instincts, too; and often, though we cannot recollect the why or the wherefore, the time or the circumstances regarding an object suddenly presented to us, we feel that it is connected with pleasant or unpleasant things in the past, that there have been causes to love, or hate, or fear a person whose very name and being we have forgotten. Thus was it with Bernard de Rohan and Father Willand; for though he knew not where they had met before, though he was not sure that they ever had met, he was sure that if they had, there had existed good cause to hold the priest in some esteem.

When all the arrangements for the succeeding night had been made between the priest and the young cavalier, the latter turned to a point connected with the same subject, which pressed somewhat heavily upon his mind.

"And now, my good Father Willand," he said, "you must tell me, sincerely and candidly, whether you have reason to be perfectly certain that this Lord of Masseran has betaken himself to the court of France."

"My dear son," replied the priest, "there is nothing upon the earth or under the earth that we have any reason to be

perfectly certain of. And now that you put it in my head," he added, pausing thoughtfully for a moment or two—"now that you put it into my head, there are several reasons for believing that this Savoyard devil has not gone to Paris. In the first place, I advised him to go, which is a strong reason for supposing he would not, he being one of those who thinks that no man can be sincere in anything. I was so far sincere, however, that I told him what is really the only way of saving his neck from the gripe of the King of France; but I had another object, too, which was to clear the place of his uncomfortable presence. At the same time, there is a second reason for believing that he is not gone to the court of France ——"

"There are a thousand," interrupted Bernard de Rohan.

"Ay, but there is one," rejoined the priest, "which, though not one out of your thousand, is stronger than all the rest—namely, that the worthy and truth-loving Lord of Masseran told some of his servants, and those not the most confidential ones, that he had gone to Paris. Now, as he was never known to tell truth in his life when a lie would do as well, this is a second strong reason for believing that he has not gone to Paris. But then again, on the other hand, we have to recollect that it is very possible he might for once tell the truth, in the hope and expectation that, from his known character, it might be mistaken for a lie, and deceive his dear friends that way. In short, the matter is doubtful; for every saying of the Lord of Masseran is, like one of the learned propositions of the schools on which we dispute so learnedly, compounded of so much lie, that if there be a grain of truth therein, the finest head in France will not separate it in a year. But let me hear, my son, let me hear; what reasons have you to bring forward on the one side or the other?"

"None of very great weight, indeed!" replied Bernard de Rohan, unable to divulge the orders, written or verbal, that he bore from the Maréchal de Brissac. "A report, indeed, has reached us in Italy," he continued, "that this man is playing a double part between the courts of France and Austria; and when I did hear of his departure, I certainly suspected that the end of his journey might be Milan rather than Paris."

"I will soon learn that," cried the priest; "I will soon learn that. What you suspect is anything but improbable. And although—knowing well the object of your journey—he might give out that he went to Paris to clear himself before he saw you, yet the whole may be false together, and he himself be within ten miles of his castle at the present time.

One thing, however, is clear, my son; no time is to be lost, and in the meantime I will ascertain beyond all doubt what road he took."

"But can you ascertain?" demanded Bernard de Rohan; "is it possible to learn exactly, in such a labyrinth-like country as this?"

The priest laughed. "Beyond all doubt, my son, beyond all doubt," he said. "The past we can always ascertain.—The future is God's," he added, more reverently—"the future is God's, and must rest in his dark council chamber. But do you not know—have you not yourself seen, that though the peasant and the traveller wander along the sides of these mountains without beholding anything but the grey stone, and the clear stream, and the green bush—though he might whistle all the lays of France and Italy together, and blow all the horns that ever were winded, from Naples to the far north, without rousing anything but a roebuck or an eagle—there are particular sounds to be uttered by particular voices, which would call every bush into life, and change every rock into an armed man? My good friend, my good friend, the mountain is full of eyes; and the Lord of Masseran himself, though he knows it is so, does not know to what extent. There is only one being under the blue eye of heaven that sees it all, and that is the man whom I met with you the other night."

"He is certainly a very extraordinary being," replied Bernard de Rohan; "and I would fain know more of him."

"In all probability you will know more," replied the priest. "But you may meet with thousands like him in various parts of the world. There are three places where you generally find the great rogues congregate—the court, the court of law, and the refectory. The honest man has only two places that I know of—the mountain-side and the highway. There are exceptions, you know—for instance, there is a very honest priest who has the care of the poor souls in the parish of Saint John of Bonvoisin, just across the frontier line in France.—Sinner that I am!—what should he be doing here, using his time no better than his patron, Saint Anthony, used his head?—Why should he be here, I say, preaching to the stones upon this mountain, when his reverend predecessor preached to fishes and petted a pig? However, the King—a blessing on his good-humoured head!—sent the said priest to Bonvoisin to keep him out of harm's way; for that boisterous heretic, Clement Marot, threatened to drive his dagger into him for throwing back some of his ribald poetry on his own head. Then again, the grave and serious Admiral felt aggrieved at his preaching, one Saint Anthony's day,

upon the subject of herrings, which he vowed was a satire upon the tax he had laid on the fishery. However, there the good priest is—or rather there he is not, but ought to be—one of the honestest men in all France, if you will take his own word for it: a great rogue, according to some men, and a good soul, according to others. There may be two or three like him in other parts of France; and depend upon it, wherever they are, you will find the poor speak well of them, the widows and the maidens over forty shake their heads and disparage them when they compare them with their reverend predecessor; while some very grave men in the parish look wise and suspect them to be heretics, without being able to prove it."

Bernard de Rohan smiled; but wishing to hear somewhat more of Father Willand's acquaintance with his friend Corse de Leon, he replied, "I thought that this same good priest you mention, if not a Savoyard by birth, had a Savoyard cure, and that the first of his penitents was our good friend Corse de Leon."

"You are mistaken, my son," replied the ecclesiastic. "You are mistaken altogether. He has no cure in Savoy, though he may have business there; and as to Corse de Leon being a penitent, he is very impenitent, indeed. I remember now," he continued, in a thoughtful way, "it is some five or six years since, when I was travelling through a little village called Pommieres, not far from the foot of Mount Rosa, that the people called me to confess a young man who had been crushed under an earth slip of the mountain. It was difficult to get him to confess at all; and one priest from Saint Maurice had left him. But I set about the matter in a different way, told him I did not think he would die, and had great hopes of his not being damned if he did. He said he would rather die than not; but I argued him out of that, and in the end got him to make a full confession. What he did confess is no business of yours, my son; but I found him to be a man who had suffered many wrongs, and had endured bitter griefs; but one who was naturally as kind of heart as he was bold, fearless, and determined, and as noble and generous in his purposes as he was sometimes wild, fierce, and intemperate in their execution. I sat by his bed-side for six weeks; for the three first of which he fluttered between life and death. At the end of that time he recovered, and his frame, like iron tempered in the fire, seemed to become but the stronger and more active for what it had undergone. Two or three years elapsed ere I met him again, and by that time he had become Corse de Leon. The cause of his quitting his native country,

France, which was just before I first met with him, was, that on his return from the army, where he had served his king for years, he found his sister injured, insulted, and disgraced by the intendant of a high nobleman, who was lately dead. He first sought for justice; but could not obtain it. He then visited the death-bed of the poor girl, and found her head supported by the daughter of that very high noble, and her lips moistened by the hand of — *Bernard de Rohan.* He turned away as soon as death had done its work, and, mad for revenge, had sought the house of the intendant. But the generous spirit of two high youths, Bernard de Rohan and Henry de Brienne, had been beforehand with him, and had driven forth with ignominy the oppressor whom he sought. Still, however, the thing rankled on his mind, and the injustice which he had once suffered and but too often seen, turned a portion of his blood to bitterness. — But hark! there is mine host knocking at the door to tell us that supper is ready; and what is all human nature compared with supper?"

CHAPTER IX.

The evening was dark and somewhat stormy; and, though the hour was the same as that in which Bernard de Rohan had met Isabel on the preceding day, so much less light was there now in the heavens, that he could scarcely see the postern gate, while with a beating heart he watched it from the small clump of fir trees of which we have already spoken. Although a hollow and whistling wind blew sharp and strong amongst the mountains, the heavy vapours hung unmoved around the peaks; and, though there was a reddish glare upon the edges of some of the clouds in the western sky, no light was derived from any lingering rays of the sun. Everything was gloomy, and dark, and cheerless; and yet the heart of Bernard de Rohan beat high with love, with joy, with expectation.

She was to be his—the being whom he had so long, so deeply, so tenderly loved. Within one short hour she was to be his own, bound to him by that indissoluble bond, to which he looked forward all the more joyfully because it was to be eternal. Whose heart would not beat high at the fulfilment of the dream of years?

At length he thought he saw the door move, and, darting forward, he opened it gently. Isabel was waiting within,

with the faithful Henriot and her silent maid; and though she trembled very much as Bernard threw his arms around her, it was agitation, not fear, which moved her. The Lord of Masseran was still absent: there was no one likely to interrupt them; and when her lover strove to soothe and to encourage her, telling her that his own men were within sound of his horn, and many more unseen, surrounding them on all sides, she replied, by assuring him in a low voice, that she had no apprehension, and was ready to follow him whithersoever he would. Still, however, he saw that she was agitated; and as he led her forth, he poured many a soothing and a tender word into her ear, drawing her nearer to his heart, and seeming to assure her, by every action as well as by every word, that the love and the protection which he was about to vow, was as tender, as unchangeable, as the brightest dream of hope and expectation could picture it.

"Do you know the chapel down in the valley, my Isabel?" he asked, as he led her onward down a narrow path that wound along the side of the hill, as close under the walls of the castle as might be. "We have obtained the keys, and the priest is waiting."

"But at this hour," demanded Isabel, eagerly—"can he perform the service at this hour?"

"He has procured full authority," replied Bernard, in the same low tone. "Nothing, dear girl, has been left undone."

"Hark!" said Isabel, stopping. "Did you not hear some voices above?"

He paused, and listened, but no sound met his ear. "The echo of our own voices," he answered: "though we speak low, they catch the angles of the rock, and are given back again to our own ears. But let us hasten onward, dearest. Once thou art mine, such apprehensions will cease."

Nothing occurred to interrupt them. Step by step over the rough and incumbered path they pursued their way, till at length in the lowest part of the valley, shut in between the small river and the rock on which the castle stood, appeared an old Gothic chapel. The pinnacles, the towers, the mouldings of the little building, in all their rich tracery, were fully visible; for, as the party descended, the chapel lay exactly between them and a clear part of the stream, so that the glistening surface of the water formed a background to the dark lines of the building, though none of the surrounding scenery, except the bold masses of some adjacent rocks, could be distinguished.

Thither, by another path, which, being cut through the rock, gave admission to the castle at once, had Isabel often

come to attend the service on Sundays and on holydays; but all seemed changed as she now approached it; as much, indeed, in regard to the feelings with which she revisited it, as to the aspect of the place itself. Through the windows on the side which they approached, a small ray of light stole forth from the altar like a pure and holy religion in the midst of ages of darkness; and, guided onward by that, they were soon at the door of the chapel. It yielded easily to the hand, and Isabel, half led, half supported by Bernard de Rohan, found herself approaching that altar where the last vow of maiden love was to be spoken. On one side of that altar stood the good priest, Father Willand, but on the other, to the surprise both of Bernard de Rohan and of Isabel de Brienne, appeared the ordinary priest of the place, pale, somewhat agitated, and looking from time to time round the building with a wild and fearful glance.

"Quick!" cried Father Willand, as the party approached; "you have been very long, my children. Let us dispatch this business speedily, and put out the lights."

"I am forced," said the other priest, "by commands that I dare not disobey, to be here this night; but I call you all to witness that it is against my will that I am here; and in case the Lord of Masseran——"

"Pooh, pooh!" exclaimed Father Willand, "we don't want you to be here at all, my good friend. All we want is the chapel—I will read the service, brother.—Approach, my children, approach." And taking up the book, he commenced at once, and in the most abridged form that the church allowed, the marriage service between Bernard de Rohan and Isabel de Brienne.

The latter needed support not a little; but the quiet maid, who was the only woman that accompanied her, was far too inanimate and statue-like to afford her any. It was in no ordinary circumstances that poor Isabel was placed. True, indeed, she was not called upon to give her hand to one who was nearly a stranger to her, as is but too often the case—true, that with her all the sweet and delicate feelings which surround the heart of woman from her youth were not to be rudely plucked away without preparation, like flowers torn by a harsh and reckless hand, which, while it takes, injures the plant which bore them; true, that she was giving herself to one whom she had long known and deeply loved, and towards whom she had ever looked as to her promised husband: but still she was becoming his bride suddenly, secretly; she was flying with him in darkness and in concealment, with the presence of none of those bound to her by

the ties of blood to sanction the new bonds that she was taking upon her.

The fear, too, of discovery and pursuit, was superadded to all the other feelings which such circumstances might well produce. She knew that it might not, and probably would not, be long, before her mother—who had been left evidently as a sort of spy upon her actions and a gaoler of her person, rather than a friend, a protector, and an adviser—might send to make sure that the harsh commands of the Lord of Masseran were strictly observed, and that she did not quit the walls of the castle for a moment during his absence; and she was well aware that the discovery of her flight would produce instant pursuit. Thus, though generally she kept her eyes either bent down upon the ground, or raised with a look of affection and confidence towards Bernard de Rohan, yet from time to time she cast a hasty glance over her shoulder towards the door of the chapel; and as she did so, she remarked that the same fears seemed also to possess the waiting woman, whose eyes were generally turned in the same direction.

No interruption took place, however. The words—the irrevocable words that bound her and Bernard de Rohan together—were spoken in a low but a firm voice. The ring was upon her finger. The benediction was pronounced, and for a moment, for one short moment, she was clasped as a bride in the arms of him she loved, when there came suddenly a noise as of something thrown down in the small vestry on the right-hand side of the altar.

The priest instantly put out the lights. Bernard de Rohan still held her close to his heart with his left arm, but, at the same time, laid his right hand upon his sword. Before he could draw it, however, three men sprang upon him, two from the vestry itself, and one from a window behind him, through which several had forced a way.

All was now darkness and confusion in the chapel; but it was evident that the number of persons it contained increased every moment. The young cavalier strove violently to free himself, and by an exertion of his great strength, dragged his assailants hither and thither; but still they clung to him, still, twining round his arms, they prevented him from grasping either sword or dagger, and from reaching the small hunting horn which he carried at his side, and which he knew, could he but blow it, would bring assistance speedily. Frustrated in his attempt to lift it to his lips, he raised his voice and shouted loudly; but fresh assailants poured upon him; a scarf was tied over his mouth; his hands were

pinioned behind, and he found himself irretrievably a prisoner.

All was darkness, as I have said; not the least light appeared in the chapel, and no words were spoken aloud by any one; so that all Bernard de Rohan could hear was the moving of many feet—a low murmuring whisper, as if of consultation or direction, and the sobbing of a bosom which he knew too well to be that of her he loved best on earth. At one time a voice was raised somewhat louder than the rest, and he thought he distinguished the tones of Adrian de Meyrand. The next moment another voice, that he did not know, replied, "No, not that way. Keep that door shut. There is another here which leads us thither more quickly."

Now completely overpowered—although his heart burned within him, and he longed for the strength of him who cast down the temple of Gaza, to burst the bonds upon his hands—Bernard de Rohan strove no longer with those who held him, for he felt that to struggle was utterly vain. Nevertheless, it was not without rude violence that they dragged him along through the vestry, and from thence by a small door into the open air. The scarf was still over his mouth, so that he could not speak, and could scarcely breathe; but as there was some slight increase of light, he looked eagerly around him. Isabel, however, was not to be seen. There were some dark scattered groups here and there, but he could distinguish no one clearly, and was dragged on towards the rock on which the castle of Masseran stood.

Into whose power he had now fallen there was no doubt. The character of the man was well known; and had Bernard de Rohan thought at that moment of his own probable fate, he could have anticipated nothing but the darkest and most atrocious termination of the act which had been just committed. At that moment, however, he thought alone of Isabel de Brienne; and he remembered, with grief and agony that will not bear description, what might be the consequences to her, of falling into the hands of the Lord of Masseran under such circumstances, and beyond the pale of her native country.

They dragged him on, however, across the short space which lay between the rock on which the castle stood and the chapel, to a spot where a doorway presented itself, hewn in the solid stone, under the arch of which appeared a soldier with a light. Into his hands those who brought him thither consigned the young French gentleman, pushing him forward, and saying, "There, take him, and put him where my lord told you."

The man with the light replied nothing, but with another, who had been standing behind him, received the prisoner from the hands of his comrades, and, with somewhat more gentleness than they had shown, led him onward. The moment he had taken a step or two forward, a large oblong mass of solid rock, which, turning upon a pivot, served the purpose of a door, and when shut, blocked up the whole passage that led under ground to the castle, rolled slowly to behind him. He went on patiently, for it was clear that no effort of his own could effect anything towards his deliverance; and when he had gone on some way, and ascended a small flight of steps, he found another armed man standing with a light, at a door plated with iron. Those who followed told him to go in, and he found himself in a dungeon, of which he was evidently not the first tenant, for there was a crust of bread covered with long green mould upon the table, and a broken water pitcher in one corner of the room. There was a bed too, with some straw at one side of the door, and a single chair; but besides these necessaries, there appeared hanging from the wall, to which they were attached by a stanchion imbedded in the solid masonry, a large heavy ring, and some strong linked fetters. At these Bernard de Rohan gazed for a moment fiercely, and then turned his eyes to one of his gaolers who had been removing the mouldy crust from the table, and the broken water cruise from the corner of the dungeon.

The man seemed to understand the look at once. "No!" he said—"no! They are not for you, unless you are violent. —But we may let you speak now as much as you like." And he untied the scarf from Bernard de Rohan's lips. The young cavalier drew a deep breath, and then demanded, "What is the meaning of this? Why am I here?—Take notice, and remember that I am an officer of Henry the Second, King of France, now actually on his service—that I came hither from the Maréchal de Brissac with despatches and messages to the Lord of Masseran, and that bitter will be the punishment of all those who injure or detain me."

The man heard him to the end with the most perfect composure, and then replied, "We neither know nor care, young gentleman, who or what you are, or in whose service you are. We obey the commands of our own lord; and if you are inclined to give up all resistance, and be quiet, we will untie your arms, and let you have the free use of your limbs and tongue. There is only one thing necessary for you to tell us. Will you be quiet and peaceable, or will you not?"

"I have no choice," replied Bernard de Rohan, in a bitter

tone. "As you have wrongfully and unjustly made me a prisoner, I have no power of resisting whatsoever you choose to do with me."

"That is talking sensibly," replied the man; "but in the first place, if you please, we will take away all these pleasant little things from you, as I would rather have them in my hand than my throat." And he deliberately stripped the prisoner of all his weapons, to keep them, as he said, with a laugh, for his use at a future time. He then untied his arms, which were benumbed with the tight straining of the cords with which they had bound him, and saying, "I will bring you some food," he moved towards the door where his companions stood.

"I want no food," replied Bernard de Rohan, gloomily; and in his heart he asked himself if any human being could find appetite to eat in such an abode as that.

"You will come to it, young gentleman—you will come to it," replied the man: "before you get out, you will come to it well enough. I have seen many a one who thought of nothing else all the day long but the time for eating and drinking. Why, it was the only thing they had to do with life. They might as well have been a stone in the wall if it had not been for that."

With this awful sermon upon the imprisonment that awaited him, the gaoler set down the lamp he had in his hand, and went away. He returned in a minute or two, however, with some food, which he placed upon the table before which the young cavalier was still standing, exactly as the other had left him. The man gave him a cold look, as if merely to see how he bore it, and then once more quitted the dungeon, turning the key in the heavy lock.

Bernard de Rohan remained long in that same attitude, and filled with the same dark and melancholy thoughts. Still, still they pressed upon his brain, although he sought to banish them and to bear his condition with his usual equanimity and fortitude. He was not one ever to give way to despair, where any opportunity existed for active exertion; but here he could do nothing. With his own hand he could not right himself. With his own voice he could not plead his cause. Talent or genius he might possess, but all in vain. Vigour and courage were useless. There was but one thing left—endurance; a species of courage which the very bravest do not always possess. Bernard de Rohan strove to summon it to his aid. It came but slowly, however; and, when he thought of Isabel of Brienne, his own sweet, beautiful bride, snatched from him in the very first

moment that he could call her so, resolution forsook him, and in agony of heart he cast himself down upon the straw in his dungeon.—Was that his bridal bed?

CHAPTER X.

"Now, then, have I not kept faith with you?" said a voice in the chapel.

"Yes, in truth you have," replied a second voice, "but I fear we have been too late. The falling of that accursed horse has lost us the five minutes—the important five minutes, on which all success in life so often depends."

"You should not bring fine pampered Barbary steeds into these wild mountains, Count," replied the other voice; "but a bold man is never too late. The lover is safe enough for a long time to come, and you can ——"

"Hush! hush!" said the other, as if fearful that their conversation, though the tone in which they spoke was little louder than a whisper, should reach the ears of some one near.

"Oh! she has fainted," said the other. "She sank back upon my arm a minute or two ago. Here! Forli, bring me a lantern!"

A lantern was soon brought; and, one side being opened, the light was suffered to stream full upon the face of Isabel de Brienne. The beautiful eyes were closed; the long dark lashes rested on the fair cheek; the lips themselves were pale; and there was no indication that the heavy, senseless sleep in which she lay was not the slumber of death itself, except a slight movement of the fingers, as if the cord that tied her wrists caused some corporeal pain, which was felt even through the swoon in which she lay. It was upon her face and form alone that the full light shone, but the feeble rays which found their way around dispelled in some degree, though but slightly, the profound darkness that before had filled the whole building. No one could be seen so as to be recognised; but in various parts of the chapel appeared groups of dark figures, all holding aloof from the spot where the unhappy girl lay with her head resting upon the upper step of the altar, except two tall and powerful men, who stood close to her, and another, who knelt down, holding the lantern to her face.

"Were it not better to take her away at once?" said one of the voices.

"There is the ring upon her finger!" said the other, without answering the question. "Accursed be that brute for thus delaying us! I will shoot him with my own hand when I get back." He paused a moment, and then continued—"So, he thinks that there is no charm which can ever get that ring off again. But I will find one; and, if I mistake not, there is even now a mighty magician in the Louvre preparing the counter-spell.—No, no, my good lord, we will not change our plan. I must appear as the deliverer, not as the offender. The time is gone by when ladies fell in love with their ravishers; but where shall it be?—Up towards La Chapelle?"

"No, no," replied the other—"that will not do. You might say I was going to join the Emperor. No, better in the valley just above Les Echelles. There, too, my good friend, we shall be free from those who stopped us in our last attempt. It will take us till daylight to get there, and that will be just the time."

"Hush! she is waking!" said the other. "Quick, close the lantern!" and, after a few words more spoken in a still lower tone, there was a considerable movement in the chapel. Several persons came and went; and Isabelle de Brienne, gradually awaking again to a consciousness of her unhappy situation, heard the stern tones of the Marquis of Masseran, now speaking in a loud voice, and giving various orders to the people that surrounded him.

"Is the litter not come yet?" he said. "Go, some one, and hasten it: I will take care that no such plots as these are carried on again. Have you got the priest? I trust you have not let him escape."

"He is safe enough," replied one of the others; "he is safe enough, and up at the castle by this time.—Here is the litter, my lord."

"Come, fair madam," said the Lord of Masseran. "If you cannot walk, we must have you borne forth. But surely a lady sufficiently active to deceive her own mother, and to find her way hither on such a night as this, may very well walk to the chapel door."

"My lord," said Isabel, faintly, "I did not deceive my mother. It was only one prisoner who concealed her plan of escape from another, compelled—I trust and believe unwillingly—to act the part of a spy and a gaoler.—I call every one to witness," she added, speaking as loud as her feeble state would permit, "that I protest against your removing

me any where but to the court of the King of France, my native sovereign."

"Who said we were going to take you anywhere but to his court?" rejoined the Lord of Masseran. "Come, madam, come! Cease arguments and protests; I am your mother's husband, your guardian for the time, and that guardianship you shall not break through very easily." Thus saying, he raised her rudely by the arm, and, half leading, half dragging her, conveyed her to the door of the chapel, and placed her in a horse litter which stood near. Some further delay took place while the men around were mounting their horses and arranging the order of their march. When this was completed, however, the Lord of Masseran put himself at the head of his troop and proceeded at a slow pace, taking a road that led away from the castle.

Isabel, unable to move, lay in the litter, and wept; but she remarked, that from time to time single horsemen passed from the rear to the front, and from the front to the rear, and that manifold were the orders and directions given to the different persons of whom the party was composed. No one, however, spoke a word to her; but it was some consolation to see, as day began to break upon their weary journey onward, that there was the form of another woman amongst the troopers on before. Isabel thought, too, that she had once heard, during the night, the voice of her maid speaking in a somewhat complaining tone; and the idea of having her society in the state of captivity she was doomed to suffer was no slight alleviation.

It was just at that moment—while the sky was still grey with night, but the rocks and trees and mountains round about growing every instant more clear and defined, that a good deal of bustle and agitation became evident in the party of the Marquis of Masseran. A minute or two afterwards he halted on the edge of the hill, and was seen speaking eagerly with some of his followers. At the same time the sound of a trumpet was heard, and Isabel thought she could distinguish the galloping of horse. She then saw a number of the Lord of Masseran's followers, who were on before her, dismount, and, unslinging their fire-arms, fire a shot or two into the valley. A loud volley of musketry from some distant spot was heard immediately afterwards, and the marquis, apparently in great haste and agitation, ordered the litter to be brought on with all speed, and driven forward in advance of the party. The discharges of musketry, however, both from his own attendants and from those who seemed to be pursuing him, grew more and more frequent every moment;

the smoke drifted down the valley in long white wreaths, enveloping the litter and making all the objects more indistinct than before; while the galloping of horse was now clearly heard, together with loud voices giving orders. Then came the clashing of swords, and two or three men on horseback were driven fiercely past the litter, contending with others hand to hand. After a short scene of tumult and confusion, the sound of the firing appeared to come from a greater distance. The two men on horseback who were guarding the litter suddenly stopped, gazed around them, and galloped away at full speed. The actual driver slipped down the rocks into the valley below, and seemed to hide himself amongst the bushes; while Isabel remained alone with her hands tied, and unable to quit the vehicle into which she had been placed.

A number of voices talking aloud, however, soon met her ear, and a gay and gallant party, somewhat soiled with dust and smoke, rode up to the spot where she lay. The leader of the victorious body sprang from his horse at once; and while one of his followers caught the reins of the horses in the litter, the Count de Meyrand approached Isabel's side, exclaiming, in a tone of much pity and commiseration, "I fear, indeed, Mademoiselle de Brienne, that you must have suffered terribly. Good God!" he continued, "the villain has actually tied her hands;" and on the spot, with his own dagger, he cut the cords which had left a deep print on the small delicate wrists that they had bound. At the same time, he added many a soothing word, but still with a tone of deference and respect, which made Isabel feel that deliverance by his hand was not, as she had at first been inclined to think, more painful than her former captivity. She spoke a few words of thanks for his assistance and attention; and with an eagerness that waited not to be questioned, Adrian of Meyrand went on to tell her "that he had heard, late on the preceding night, that some violence had been shown to her, in consequence of an attempt she had made to escape from the castle of Masseran, and that her mother's husband was carrying her away far into Savoy."

"I have good reason to know," continued the Count, "that this man has secret communications with the enemies of France, and I doubt not that his purpose was to remove you for ever from the neighbourhood of your friends and connexions, from your native country, and from the protection of the King. Although," he added, with a sigh, "I was not sure that my assistance would be acceptable, yet I could not resist my inclination to follow and offer you deliverance. I

was afraid of offending you; but these bonds upon your hands, sweet lady, evidently show that you were carried away against your will, and therefore that what I have done has not been in vain."

His words agreed so well with the suspicions which Isabel de Brienne had before entertained regarding the views and purposes of the Lord of Masseran, that they taught her to put more faith in the Count than she otherwise might have been inclined to do. The respectful tone which he assumed, too, removed, as we have said, many anxieties from her mind, and she again expressed her thanks for the service he had rendered her, but still looked bewildered, in his face, as if inquiring what was to be done next.

The Count de Meyrand skilfully read that look, and knowing that her situation placed her entirely in his power for the time, he determined to leave her the utmost appearance of unrestrained liberty, so long as she could use it to no effect. He said not a word, then, in regard to where her steps should be turned, but stood beside the litter with his cap in his hand, and the feather trailing on the ground as if waiting for her commands.

Isabel was embarrassed—she could have wished to tell him all that had occurred; she could have wished to say, "I am Bernard de Rohan's wife. Protect me for the sake of your friend and companion." But there was a hesitation, a doubt, an apprehension: she had known and she had seen, with a woman's clear insight into all those things that appertain to love, how strong and dangerous was the passion which the Count de Meyrand had conceived for her; and though timidity had certainly some share in making her hesitate to acknowledge at once her union with Bernard de Rohan, yet an apprehension of endangering him, of making his imprisonment more severe, of putting his very life in peril if she acknowledged her union with him to his rival, confirmed her resolution of taking time to think ere she so acted. What she was next to do, however, was the immediate question; and after a long and embarrassing pause she said, half as a question to herself and half to the Count, "Where can I go to, and what can I do?"

That question was what Meyrand expected, and what he desired. "If I might advise," he said, in a humble tone, "Mademoiselle de Brienne would at once proceed to the court of the King of France, and put herself under the protection of her own sovereign, who is the person best qualified to guide and guard her. She will there also have the counsel and assistance of her brother, and will consequently be res-

tored to that situation of freedom, comfort, and I trust peace, of which I must think she was deprived by her mother's marriage with this unprincipled Savoyard."

"But there are many things," said Isabel, in a low tone—"but there are many things, Monsieur de Meyrand——" and as she spoke, the thought came across her of leaving the man, to whom she had so lately given her hand, in danger, in grief, perhaps in misery, and of putting many hundreds of miles between them within a few hours after they had pledged themselves to each other to remain together for life.

The Count de Meyrand, however, cut her short. "At all events, dear lady," he said, "it is necessary, very necessary, for us to pass the French frontier immediately.—It is at no great distance; and a few hours will place us in our native land. Depend upon it, this good Lord of Masseran will not lose his prize so easily. Every man I have in Savoy is with me here. He can call hundreds to his aid, and, I fear, might overwhelm me, in spite of all resistance. If, indeed, you wish to remain in Savoy, I will do my best to protect you; but I fear much the consequences, and I would advise—nay, persuade you, to take the road to France at once. You can determine upon your future conduct afterwards, when we are once across the frontier; for though France holds this country by armed force, still it is not our own, and while we keep the fortresses, we are obliged to leave the open country to its fate.—Ha!" he continued, gazing along the road, down which a party of his attendants were now leading a horse, bearing the poor quiet *soubrette*, who had followed her mistress through that eventful night—"Ha! here come some of my people, seemingly with a woman servant. If she be any one you can depend upon, it may be a great comfort to you to have her with you."

"She is my own maid," replied the lady, "and I think, my lord, as you do, that we had better in the first instance make our way into France direct, if the distance be not great to the frontier."

"It is but a few hours' ride," replied the Count. "But we must lose no time, lest the enemy be upon us."

Though Isabel was fatigued and exhausted with sorrow, agitation, and want of rest, she signified her readiness to proceed at once, and the horses in her litter were turned in the direction of the frontier. Her maid, too, weary with the long journey on horseback, took her place beside her mistress in the more easy conveyance; and the Count de Meyrand, riding close to the vehicle, continued to offer to Isabel de Brienne every kindly and soothing attention. Nor was his

manner marked by any such signs of admiration or affection as could give her pain; but at the same time it must be confessed she would have been much better satisfied to have been left to a communion with her own thoughts. The mere necessity of travelling any distance under the guidance and protection of a man whose love she had been forced to reject, and who had pressed it upon her in a way that she felt to be insulting, was painful in the highest degree; and the prospect of having to proceed far in such circumstances was so grievous, that she resolved at all risks to avoid it. What plan she was to form for this purpose was a question which required much thought to answer: but the Count took care that she should have no time either for calm consideration, or for discussing her future prospects with the woman who accompanied her, and who was, in fact, the only one now with her whom she had known long and well.

Ere three hours were over, they passed the frontier into France; and Isabel could not help thinking it strange, that, if the Lord of Masseran's purpose had been to throw himself into the hands either of the emperor or of Philip of Spain, he should thus have approached within a few leagues of the French territory. There were other circumstances also in all that had passed which puzzled her; but she had no means of accounting for any of these matters, and could not lull to sleep the suspicions which they occasioned.

At the first village which they came to, it was found necessary to pause for the purpose of refreshing the horses of the litter: and everything that could be procured for her comfort and convenience was ordered with prompt and careful attention by the Count of Meyrand. When he had seen that a chamber had been prepared for her in the little inn, where she could repose for an hour or two, and that refreshments of various kinds were in active preparation, he ordered his horse to be brought round again, much to her surprise, saying, "It will be better for me now to leave you, Mademoiselle de Brienne. You will be in security here till my return; but I must go and scour the country towards Chambery, to make sure that none of this man's parties have crossed the frontier, and are watching for you on your onward way."

Isabel was anxious to put the best interpretation on her companion's conduct, and it seemed to her that this might merely be a delicate excuse to leave her for the time. She was willing to imagine that such an explanation had taken place between the Count and Bernard de Rohan as to deprive the former of all hope of obtaining her hand, and she fancied that Adrian de Meyrand's conduct, in the present instance, might

be guided by a wish to show that his purposes were only those of friendship and honourable courtesy. She would not, however, banish the suspicions to which woman's instinctive insight into the passion of which she is the object gave rise, and, for fear of being mistaken, she would not say one word to prevent his going, although she felt that it was scarcely courteous of her not to do so, and though she thought that there was an expression of disappointment on his face at the cold indifference with which she heard the announcement.

CHAPTER XI.

THE Count de Meyrand and his horsemen wound slowly away from the door of the little cabaret, leaving Isabel de Brienne and her maid the only tenants of the place. Both were extremely tired; and the lady herself would have desired to lie down to rest at once rather than wait for the preparation of any kind of food, but that she was also anxious to converse over her situation with her attendant, and to see if, between them, they could not devise some plan of future conduct which might obviate the difficulties which surrounded her. She therefore did not even propose to take rest; and began the conversation at once; but taciturn as the woman always was, she was at present more so than ever. There was not only a sort of sullenness in her manner which somewhat displeased Isabel, but she spoke rather in the tone of one who had been injured than in compassion for the greater sufferings of her mistress. In answer to all inquiries regarding what had been done in the chapel after her lady had lost the power of observing what was passing, she replied merely, that she had been as frightened as anybody, and thought of nobody but herself.

"You seem to be grieved, Marguerite," said Isabel de Brienne, after this sort of conduct had proceeded some time —"you seem to be grieved, Marguerite, that you have aided me in this business, and so brought some inconveniences upon yourself."

"No, mademoiselle," she said, shortly, "but I am very tired."

"Then I think you had better go to bed," replied Isabel— "I shall not want you for some hours."

"I will, presently, mademoiselle," replied the maid; "but I am very hungry."

Isabel had not the heart to smile, as she might have done on another occasion; for selfishness is, perhaps, less offensive when it stands out in its plain simplicity than when it is discovered through a hypocritical disguise. In fact, like ugliness, it is more ugly when painted. Almost as the soubrette spoke, however, the good woman of the house, who was a widow, brought in with her own hands, and the hands of a maid-servant—which were exactly like another pair of her own, for they enacted nothing without her orders—several dishes for the morning meal, which were placed with all due reverence before Isabel de Brienne. The young lady tried to eat; but as she did so, the thought of many painful things, of the probable situation of him she loved best, and of the dark fate that might be hanging over him, came across her mind; and, to use the homely but expressive words of old John Hall, when describing the conduct of the first famous Duke of Buckingham, between his arrest and his execution, "The meat would not down."

The soubrette, however, made up for her mistress's want of appetite, and ate plentifully of all that was set before her. When she had done, Isabel bade her retire to rest, and at the same time ordered the food to be taken away. The soubrette at once obeyed, and left the room; and the kind-hearted hostess, remarking that the young lady had taken nothing, was pressing her at least to drink some wine, for the excellence of which she vouched, when Isabel de Brienne, whose face was towards the window, gave a slight start, and replied almost immediately, "No, my good dame, the first thing that will do me good is a little quiet reflection.—I think," she added, "that I saw just now a good monk, seemingly a pilgrim by the scallop on his shoulder, pass close to the window, as if to sit down on the bench at the door. Give him that dish of meat, and tell him a lady sent it who begs a prayer of him, as she has been in some trouble since last night."

The worthy dame of the cabaret gladly took up the dish with her own hands, and carried it forth to the wanderer. She then returned to remove some other things, and Isabel asked, somewhat eagerly, "What did he say?"

"Oh! madam, he sent you thanks," replied the hostess, "and took out a rosary, which he said had hung up at Loretto for many years, and began immediately to repeat as many paters and aves as would cost a score of crowns from our parish priest."

"Did he say nothing else?" asked Isabel, with a somewhat disappointed look.

The hostess replied in the negative, and shortly after left the young lady alone to repose. A deeper shade of melancholy then came over her. She sat and leaned her head upon her hand; and again and again the thoughts of her own situation, and that of him she loved, came across her mind, with the painful, fruitless reiteration which is the most wearying, perhaps, of all the forms of care. To know and feel that activity and exertion are absolutely necessary—to have hope, only just sufficient to deprive one of the courage of despair—to believe that there is a possibility of changing our situation, yet not to know how that change can be by any means effected, how exertion should be directed, or where hope would guide—such is the state into which, from time to time, we fall in our passage through life, and stand like men in one of those thick impervious mists which are not absolutely darkness, but which are worse than darkness itself, from not being, like it, dissolvable by light.

She thought not, indeed, so much of herself as of another. She thought of Bernard de Rohan with deep, with strong, with tender affection; and after some minutes of vague and wild inquiries as to what she could do next, she was obliged to turn to chance and fortune to find a footing for hope to rest upon—no, not to chance and fortune, but to the beneficence and mercy of God. There, then, her hope fixed—ay, and seemed to refresh itself. "Could she not," she asked herself—"could she not be, by some means, instrumental in aiding him she loved, let his situation be what it might?"

She had gathered from the struggle that had taken place in the chapel, from the want of all sounds of clashing steel, or other indications of actual combat, and also from the manner in which she had been herself dealt with, that her lover had been overpowered and made a prisoner before he could resist. She did not believe that the Lord of Masseran would dare to attempt his life. The risk, she thought, would be far too great for the object to be attained, for in truth she knew not what that object was, and believed it to be less than it really was, and far different. If, then, he were a captive in the château of Masseran, could she not, she asked herself, find means to procure his deliverance? She had heard of such things being done—ay, in the very age and times in which she lived. She had heard of woman's weak hand and persevering affection executing what man's strength and wisdom had failed to perform, and hers was a heart which, though gentle, kind, and yielding in the moment of happiness and security, was conscious of fortitude, and strength, and courage, when danger and evil assailed those that she loved.

"My father's spirit," she said, "the spirit of him who endured the whole wrath and indignation of a despotic king, sooner than abandon the friend of his youth, will bear me up through any trials, while I have the object of delivering him I love."

But how, how? was the question; what means could she take, what stratagems could she employ, while she was watched by the eyes of Adrian de Meyrand? Should she confide her purposes to him—should she appeal to his courtesy—to his friendship for her lover—to his generosity? Should she confide in him? Dared she to do so?

As she asked herself these questions, something darkened the light, as if passing across the window. She looked up.—It was all clear again. The day was bright and sunshiny, and the rays pouring in from the south-west. The window was a narrow cottage lattice, in a stone frame, divided into three partitions. It might have been a branch of the honeysuckle that climbed around it, which had been blown across by the wind, and caused the shadow. It might have been but a cloud passing over the sun; and she bent her head again, and fell once more into thought. The instant after, the shadow came again, and a voice said, "Are you quite alone?"

Isabel looked up. The pilgrim, whom she had before seen, was standing near the window, leaning on his staff, not exactly turned towards her, but standing with his shoulder towards the open lattice, and his eyes apparently bent onwards towards Savoy. There was something in his air familiar to her, though she could not tell in what it consisted. It had struck her before as he passed: even more perhaps in that momentary glance than it did now, when she saw him fully; and she could scarcely think that it was the pilgrim who spoke; or, if so, that it was to her he addressed himself. After a moment, however, he turned his face again for an instant towards the window, repeating, "Are you quite alone?"

"Quite!" replied Isabel.

"Then come near the window," said the same voice: "sit in the window-seat as if you were looking out. I will rest on this stepping-stone hard by. Let our words be short, and few, and low in tone—each word well pondered before it is spoken, and your eyes upon the door of the room from time to time."

The view which Isabel had of his face had shown her the features of an old man, somewhat sharp and keen, though they were much hidden under his hood, which was formed like

that of a capuchin. His beard, which was very white, was not so long as that of the generality of monks, and she concluded that it had been only suffered to grow during the period of his pilgrimage. He was a venerable-looking man, however; and as it was evident that he knew something of her situation; she imagined that he bore her some message, and hastened to follow his directions. The moment she had taken her place at the window, he sat down on one of the stepping-stones placed to aid travellers in mounting their horses, and there, with his face still turned away from her, commenced the conversation by asking, "Do you not know me?"

"Your voice and your air," she said, "are familiar to me, but I know nothing more."

"I am Father Willand," said the pilgrim, "who baptized you in your infancy, watched you for the first nine years of your life, till your father procured me what he thought advancement in Paris, and who united you last night to the man for whom that father had ever destined you."

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed Isabel – "I thought you had fallen into the power of that evil Piedmontese; for I could not conceive it possible, when we were all so completely surrounded, that you should make your way out."

"They caught the other priest instead of me," replied Father Willand, "and I lay hid behind the altar till they were all dispersed and gone. Your husband, lady, however, has fallen into the power of one enemy, and you into the power of another, or, what is worse than an enemy, a daring, treacherous, unhesitating lover."

"Call him not so, Father Willand!—call him not so!" replied Isabel. "Love elevates, ennobles, and purifies ——"

"Do not let us discuss love, lady," replied the priest; "I have nothing to do with it, but yet understand it, perhaps, better than you do. Love is applied to a thousand different things, and what is its right meaning were of long argument. All I know is, that you must not remain with this man an hour longer than you can help."

"Tell me how I can escape from him," said Isabel, in the same low tone. "Nothing I desire more!—But still let me do him justice: he has this day behaved well and kindly towards me, perilled his life to save me, and treated me with respect and delicacy."

"Perilled his life!" said Father Willand—"guns fired without balls, lady! swords drawn without bloodshed! a farce that would not have deceived a child! They knew you to be but a child, or they would not have tried it! Did

you see one man fall, or fallen? Did you see one drop of blood shed, for all the powder expended?"

"But still," said Isabel, though she had certainly neither seen wounds nor death follow the apparently smart encounter between the Count de Meyrand and the Lord of Masseran—"but still, he has been gentle and kind, and professes to leave me entirely to decide upon my own conduct."

"Try him—try him," said the priest: "use the liberty he professes to give, and you will find yourself a stricter prisoner than you were when in the castle of Masseran. Hearken," he continued, "for I must not be here long. I have followed you from last night till now; taking shorter paths than you have been led by, it is true: but still, lady, I am somewhat old, and somewhat fat; and, though of the quick tribe, an old greyhound will not run as long as a young one. I must have some repose; but to-night I shall be ready to give you aid wherever you may then be. When it comes, take it at a moment's warning; and, in the meantime, to make yourself sure of what you are about, exercise this liberty that you think you have. The Count de Meyrand judges you are about to set out for Paris to-morrow morning direct; tell him to-night that you have considered, and determined upon going to Grenoble to meet your brother Harry. Then see what he says. If he agree thereunto honestly, well and good; trust him! If, on the contrary, he teach you to feel that his will must be your law, then trust me, and come with me whithersoever I shall guide you!"

Isabel paused thoughtfully for a moment. "Not to Grenoble," she said, at length; "I must not go to Grenoble yet! That is too far; but if any one would convey intelligence to my brother of where I am, and bid him join me instantly at Latour, then, indeed, I might succeed ——"

"Succeed in what?" demanded the priest.

"In freeing him," replied Isabel; and though the blood rose up in her cheek as she said it, she added, the more resolutely from a slight smile that came from the priest's countenance, as he turned for an instant towards her—"in freeing my husband."

"Oh, fear not, fear not, pretty one!" replied the priest. "We'll get your bird out of the cage yet—never fear. Indeed, I did not come hither without taking care that those should have information of where he is, and how he is, who may best contrive the means for his escape."

"Still," replied Isabel, "I would rather not be far absent from the spot until I see him free."

"If you fancy, child," replied the priest, "that I want you to go to Grenoble, you must fancy a fox to be a more stupid beast than a sheep. I only told you to propose it, that you may try this fair Count of Meyrand. Trust him in nothing, child, till you see a dove drop her eggs in a hawk's nest—or till the sweet days come back again when the lamb lies down with the lion? The nature of the wolf does not change, and he who would insult you one day, will not protect you the next! Mark my words then, lady, and follow my counsel: lie down and take rest even now, so that your mind may be quick and prompt, and your limbs free and active this night. When this Count returns, go on with him to Latour, then tell him your intention is to turn aside to Grenoble. You will see in a moment whether you may trust him or me. Decide between us at once, when you have so tried him; and, after that, do not lay down your head upon your pillow till you have seen me and given me a reply."

"But how shall I see you?" demanded Isabel—"how shall I know where ——"

"I will find the means," replied the priest, interrupting her. "We must use bad things to good ends, lady; and a brown gown, which, between Paris and Loretto, covers more sin and wickedness, year after year, than all the pope's indulgences can well clear away, will carry me into many a house where no other key could gain me entrance. If you should satisfy yourself that you are in danger where you are, be prepared to follow me at a moment's notice. I will at least set you free to go where you will, and will help you in all good purposes, if I can. But, above all, be as secret, my child, as the grave; utter not a word of this to any one. I have heard by tradition that a woman once kept a secret four-and-twenty hours: all I ask of you, is to keep one six; and now, farewell, for we must talk together no more."

Thus saying, he left her; and Isabel continued to gaze from the window, pondering thoughtfully over all that had been said. It is a terrible question, the first time that man has to put it to his own heart—who can we trust? But this, alas! was not the first time that Isabel de Brienne had to ask herself that painful and bitter thing. With her, as with every one, in advancing into life, the question had been often and sadly repeated, and the bounds of the reply had become narrow and more narrow. Oh, how few are there throughout all existence that we can trust—fully, entirely, confidently trust! The faith of one; the wisdom of another; the courage of a third; the resolution of a fourth; the activity, the energy, the zeal, of others;—all—all! may be doubtful; and,

alas! in looking back through life, the sad and terrible summing up will ever be, that our confidence has been far too often misplaced than wrongly withheld.

The question, however, which Isabel had now to address to herself was more limited in its nature and character. It was only,—which of these two men shall I choose to trust?—that she had now to ask herself. Those she had to choose between were limited to two. One of those two she had already had occasion to doubt and to dislike, to fear and to avoid; and she could not but feel that over all he had since done to remove the first evil impression of his conduct there was a tinge of suspicion which she could not remove. Of the other, indeed, she knew little; but that little seemed to prove his attachment to herself and to him whom she loved. Acts that have made us very happy leave behind them a sort of tender but imperishable light, which invests all who have had any share in them, and brings them all out in brightness to the eye of memory, from the twilight gloom of the past, like those salient objects in an evening landscape, upon which we still catch the rays of a sun that has long set to our own eyes. Not only the willing agents of our happiness, but those that bore an uninterested part therein—objects animate or inanimate alike—the spot—the accessories—the very scene itself—all still retain a portion of that light, and shine to remembrance when other things are forgotten.

The priest with whom she had just spoken, however, had not only borne a willing, but an active part, in uniting her to Bernard de Rohan. For that reason, she believed that she might trust him; but, besides this, he had referred to former years; and though there was a long lapse of time between, spreading a dimness like a light sea-mist between herself and the objects of those days, yet there were vague and pleasant recollections which attached themselves by the fine links of association to the tones of the old man's voice, to his manner, even to the rough and somewhat reckless jests which he mingled with his discourse. She remembered such a person a frequent guest in her father's house; she remembered that father's often-repeated commendations of his honesty of purpose, of his sincerity of heart, of his zeal and disinterestedness; and whether it was that she herself strove to find some excuses for anything that seemed harsh or irreverent in his manner, or that her father had really pronounced such words, she thought that she remembered his having said that Father Willand's abhorrence of hypocrisy had driven him into an opposite extreme. It is true, she could not have recalled his features sufficiently to recognise

him under any other circumstances; but when once told who he was, they seemed to grow more and more familiar to her, and she determined to trust him, let the result of the trial which he had suggested for the Count de Meyrand be what it would.

CHAPTER XII.

In one of the sweetest situations that it is possible to conceive—with green sloping hills covered with the richest vegetation rising on the four sides thereof, and forming, as it were, a beautiful basin, with four long valleys, each of which bears onward its stream of clear and sparkling water—is the little town of Bourgoin, which was at that time, as now, neat, clean, and fresh-looking, with, perhaps, fewer inhabitants than it can at present boast, but without any of the manufactories which have since somewhat diminished its beauty, if they have increased its wealth.

It was the custom in those days for the signs to hang out far from the doors of the inn; and often at each side of the doorway was placed the name of the landlord, with a long recommendation of the fare and lodging to be found within, with the price of the various meals which were to be furnished to a visiter. A bench was there, also, and a wide door, giving entrance to a court-yard.

Such was not, however, altogether the aspect of the little auberge at Bourgoin. The village was too small to have a regular inn, or *gîte*, and the homely symbol of a bush, suspended from a long pole, thrust forth horizontally from the front of the building, was the only sign that it could boast. The landlord and landlady were in their green old age, and were what they term in France *bonasse*, though that word has been applied to a beast, who, if one may judge by his look, is of a very opposite sort of disposition to that which I wish to describe. They were, in short, good-humoured, honest country people; and when the landlady beheld a considerable company of horsemen draw in their bridles at her door, with a young lady and her maid in a litter in the midst, her first thought was really not of self-interest, but of what she could best do to make her fair guest happy and comfortable during the time that she was about to stay in her dwelling.

The Count de Meyrand sprang to the side of the litter which contained Isabel de Brienne; and, as if with an in-

stinctive insight into their lord's wishes, all his attendants but one, who was holding back the curtain, and one at the head of the nearest horse, kept aloof while the lady descended.

"Monsieur de Meyrand," said Isabel de Brienne, as she quitted the litter, "I cannot help repeating again that it is much against my inclination I have come hither. If you did not choose to conduct me as I asked you, on the direct road to Grenoble, you might at least have suffered me to remain for the night at Latour."

"Indeed, dear lady," replied the Count, still with an air of perfect deference, "it would have been dangerous for you to do so. There, but a few leagues from Chambery, and still less from Beauvoisin, we should have been entirely at the mercy of an enemy. In regard to Grenoble, I only besought you to pause till you could hear my reasons. You are too much fatigued to attend to them now; but ere you set out to-morrow you shall hear them at full."

"Your politeness, my good lord," replied Isabel de Brienne, with an air of grief and vexation—"your politeness is somewhat compulsory." Thus saying, she advanced towards the landlady, who had kept back at a sign from one of the Count's attendants, but not so far as to prevent her from noting all that had passed—the ears of aubergistes and aubergistes' wives acquiring by long and peculiar practice a facility of hearing everything, and not hearing anything, according to circumstances, which is truly astonishing.

The Count de Meyrand bowed low, and, following to the door, he ordered apartments immediately to be prepared for his fair charge, and then took leave of her for the night, while a slight smile played upon his lip as he turned away, and he said in his heart, "If I could trust this man of Masseran, I would humour the girl, and see what might be done by softness. She smiled upon me this morning, and made me almost forget her former insolence. It were as well, however, to bring down this high temper; and now the storm is somewhat roused, it may as well go on. No one can say I do her wrong in using some gentle force to bring her to Paris, to the presence of her lawful king, who will soon judge whether that ring be to remain upon her finger or not."

As he thus thought, he pictured to his own imagination the marriage of fair Isabel de Brienne with Bernard de Rohan annulled by the royal authority. He fancied his own claim to her hand heard and conceded. He thought of how the fact of her travelling alone with him by slow journeys across the whole of France might render her own consent a matter

more of necessity than choice; and with inward satisfaction he revolved the air of cool indifference with which he would treat the whole proceedings, as if there were absolutely nothing on earth worth the attention of so high a gentleman.

In the meanwhile, Isabel de Brienne was led to her chamber by the hostess, who asked many a kindly question, not directly pertinent to the conversation which she had overheard, but tending to elicit the cause of that anxiety and distress of mind which she witnessed. Isabel did not satisfy her, it is true; but she replied so sweetly and gently, that the good woman went away with her mind made up that she was the most amiable young lady she had ever seen, and that she was, moreover, very much ill used by some one. Who that was, she could not very well satisfy herself; but, nevertheless, she looked with no very favourable eye upon the Count de Meyrand, and made but short replies to the various questions which he asked her when she came down again.

After giving various directions to the soubrette, to which that taciturn person replied less than ever, Isabel seated herself near the window in melancholy thought. Removed almost by force from Latour, where the good priest, Father Willand, expected to find her, and having been now fully convinced by the conduct of the Count de Meyrand, that she was little better than a prisoner in his hands, she knew not whence to hope for succour or deliverance. There was many a dark and painful point in her situation on which we must not dwell; many a present, and many a future danger to herself, to him she loved, and to their mutual happiness. The thoughts connected with these points mingled with the chief strain of her reflections, and rendered them, bitter as they were, still more bitter and grievous to be borne.

As she thus sat and gazed out of the window—at some distance from it, indeed, so that those who were immediately beneath did not see where she was placed—she suddenly beheld a small body of horsemen come over the brow of the gentle hill opposite, and ride down into the village. Isabel instinctively drew back; for though her actual situation was painful in no slight degree, yet amongst those horsemen she recognised the colours of the Lord of Masseran, and it seemed to her that it would be even more terrible to fall into his power than to remain in that of the Count de Meyrand. The men came on at a quick rate, some four or five in number, and were passing by the door of the little auberge without pausing, when she heard the voice of the Count de Meyrand call to them and bid them stop to speak with him. The

first questions which he asked were put in a low voice, but the man whom he addressed spoke louder in reply, and Isabel heard the latter say distinctly, "Yes, my lord, he is gone on with all speed to Paris, and we are following him as fast as we can. We hope to come up with him at Lyons."

"By my faith this is somewhat strange," answered the Count; and then again what he said farther was lost to the ear.

In a few minutes, the Count de Meyrand suffered the horsemen to go on; but he seemed much moved by what he had heard, saying aloud, "This man will never be honest. We must not let him be long in advance. The horses must be ready by daybreak to-morrow, Matthew. Pierre, put your foot in the stirrup, and ride after those men: I saw one of them turn away from the road just now, by the clump of trees on the top of the hill. If they put their hand into the wolf's mouth, they must bear a bite."

Before the daylight failed, the man to whom he last spoke returned, informing him that as far as he could discover, the whole party had gone on towards Lyons; and the Count, better satisfied, turned once more into the inn, and sat himself down to supper in a musing mood. He sent up, indeed, a humble entreaty that the fair lady whom he had the honour to escort, as he termed it, would join him at the evening meal; but the reply returned was, that Mademoiselle de Brienne had retired to rest.

The Count soon after sought his pillow himself; but accustomed by old habits to wake at any particular hour assigned, he started up with the first gleam of daylight, and gave instant orders for preparing to set out. There were few persons yet up in the inn; but the good landlady was roused, unwillingly, from her bed, and ordered instantly to wake Mademoiselle de Brienne, and give her notice that it was time to depart. The Count himself stood at the bottom of the stairs, with his arms folded upon his chest, in that gloomy frame of mind to which dissatisfaction with ourselves is even more sure to give birth, than dissatisfaction with the things around us. But he was roused from his reverie by hearing some bustle and anxious exclamations above, the voice of the hostess raised to the tones of wonder and astonishment, the tongue of the silent maid heard at a considerably louder pitch than was at all usual, and other indications so decided of something having gone wrong as to induce the Count de Meyrand himself to quit his usual calm deliberation, and spring up the stairs with a quick step and an angry brow.

He found the door of the room which had been assigned

to Mademoiselle de Brienne unclosed, the hostess standing a few steps within, the soubrette near the bed-side, the window wide open, with the morning air sighing quietly through the lattice, and Isabel herself nowhere to be seen.

"Where is your mistress?" demanded the Count, furiously fixing his eyes upon the soubrette.

"I know not, sir," replied the woman.

"Her bed has never been slept in all night," replied the hostess. "Her sweet cheek has never rested on that pillow, poor thing. She must have got out of the window, that is clear; and if any ill have happened to her, somebody is to blame for it, I am sure."

"Silence!" said the Count, looking at her sternly.—"Did you not undertake," he continued, turning to the soubrette, "never to lose sight of her?"

"I can't sleep with my eyes open," replied the woman.

"This is that scoundrel Masseran's doing," said the Count; "but he shall find himself deceived, for I will be in Paris as soon as he is. You, madam, will be good enough to come along with me, so put your dress in some better array, and lose no time."

He looked as if he could have said a great deal more, but he restrained himself; and though the anger that he felt at heart found relief in a bitter and sneering smile, unaccompanied by any words, he turned upon his heel, walked down to the inn door, and remained for a few minutes looking forth upon the morning, as if nothing had happened. In a minute or two after, seeing one of his men pass, he beckoned to him, spoke a word or two in his ear, and suffered him to depart. The man returned in a few minutes, and replied, "They are all ignorant of anything of the kind, sir. It is evident none of the people of the place know aught about it."

"Have you seen the landlord?" demanded the Count.

"No!"

"Go and make inquiries regarding him."

The man did as he was bid, and the reply was, "That the landlord had gone away towards the market at St. Laurent an hour or two before daybreak, as was always his custom."

"That is sufficient," said the Count, with a sneer. "Quick with the horses; let us mount and go on."

CHAPTER XIII.

The great tamers of strong spirits, the quellers of the rebellious heart, the conquerors of the obdurate, the determined, and the enduring, Silence and Solitude, were upon Bernard de Rohan. To know nothing of what is passing without—to have no marker of the steps of time—to see no sun rise or set—to have not even the moving shadow upon the wall to tell us that another lapse of the wearisome hours has taken place—to have nothing, in short, to link us on to human destinies, and to show us that we are wending on our way with our fellow-beings—nothing but the dull beatings of the heavy heart, and the grinding succession of bitter thoughts;—this, surely, is not life; and if it be not death, it is something worse. Where there is no change of anything to mark its passing, time seems, in truth, to sink back into that ocean from which it was called at first, Eternity: and, wanting all means of calculating its flight, Bernard de Rohan did, indeed, feel each moment to be an age. Actual pain would have been almost a relief to the despairing vacuity of that which must have been the second day of his confinement. We can scarcely doubt that the punishment of Prometheus would have been more complete, had he been left in the solitude of the frowning heavens, without the vulture as his companion, though his tormenter.

No one came near the young cavalier throughout the whole day. The food which had been left for him was just sufficient for the four-and-twenty hours: more than sufficient, as it proved, indeed, for he tasted it not; and when, at the end of that period, it was renewed, so quick was the passing in and out of him who brought the fresh supply, that the young cavalier scarcely saw the man's entrance ere the door was again closed, and he was once more alone.

It seemed to him several hours after this brief visitation had been made—and true it is, he had gone through so many ranges of painful thought, that they might well have furnished occupation and bitterness for more than one long day—when he heard a sound at the door of the dungeon, as if some one endeavoured, with an unaccustomed hand, to draw back the heavy bolts, and turn a key in the lock. At the same time, he heard a low deep voice murmur—"The fool should have left a lamp!"—"Ay, that is right!" and the next moment the key turned, the lock gave way, and the door was thrown open.

The lamp which had been left with Bernard de Rohan burned but dimly, for it had been long untrimmed, so that at first the young cavalier did not recognise the person who entered. The next instant, however, his visitor spoke, and the deep but melodious voice instantly brought to the prisoner's recollection his wild companion, Corse de Leon.

"Ah! Monsieur de Rohan," said the Brigand, looking around him as he entered, "I have not forgotten you, you see. Out upon that scoundrel! how dared he put you in such a place as this! He might have given you a befitting chamber, at all events."

Bernard de Rohan grasped his hand; and, needing no words to assure him that the Brigand came to set him free, he thanked him again and again, but mingled, however, his thanks with some marvellings to see him within the château of Masseran.

The Brigand smiled. "There is nothing wonderful in it, Monsieur de Rohan," he replied. "There is not a door in this castle that does not open to me as readily as to its lord. All these things are easily explained. Some of the poor people with whom I have to do think me half a magician, and it is not worth while to undeceive them, though I seek not for any such reputation. Truth is marvellous enough, without trying to make it more wonderful," he continued, in a musing tone; "and all that I do which seems strange, may, nine times out of ten, be explained by a single word. I believe that it is so, too, with the wonders of creation. We gaze with surprised and astonished eyes upon thousands of things that seem miracles to our earthly nature: we are, ourselves, miracles to ourselves; but I do believe that all the wonders that we see, the marvel of our very existence, the linking of fates together, and the long net-work of events and their causes, from the beginning of all things to eternity, might all be explained to us by some simple word, which God's pleasure now withholds—by some short brief explanation which is not fitted for this mass of moving clay to receive."

As he spoke, he sat himself quietly down on the edge of the bed, took up the lamp, trimmed it in a careless manner, and then added, abstractedly, "We must wait a few minutes, Monsieur de Rohan, for the horses are not come yet, and it is as well to stay here as upon the hill-side."

"But is there no danger of our being stopped?" demanded Bernard de Rohan.

Corse de Leon smiled. "It were difficult to stop me," he

said; "but nobody will try to do it. You know the Lord of Masseran is gone to Paris?"

"No, indeed," replied the young cavalier, "I know nothing, and I have heard nothing, since I have been a prisoner in this dreary place. He has, of course, taken my Isabel with him?"

"Oh no," replied the Brigand. "He set out for Paris with great speed for several reasons: first, because he knew suspicions are entertained of him in regard to his dealings with the King of Spain; next, because he feared that inquiry would be made as to what has become of you, and he wished to justify himself; and, next, because, he did not choose to trust your goodly friend, the Count of Meyrand, in anything, but especially ——"

"But where, then, is Isabel?" demanded the young cavalier.

"Ay, who can say?" rejoined Corse de Leon.

Bernard de Rohan started up eagerly. "Let us seek for her at once, then," he said. "If, as you say, all the doors of this castle open to you as easily as to their lord, let us seek her through every room in the place, and take her with us when we go. In Heaven's name, leave her not here!"

"She is not here, wherever she is," replied the Brigand; "and I trust that by this time she is free;—but I will tell you more by and by, for I hear the clock striking one, and we shall have just time to reach the hill-side before the horses arrive. Come, Monsieur de Rohan, come. They have taken your arms from you, I see. Well, we must find you others."

Thus saying, he raised the lamp, and led the way towards the door. As he went, however, the light fell upon the fetters which hung against the wall, and he paused, gazing upon them, and frowning heavily. "Ah, ah, accursed implements of tyranny!" he muttered. "When, when will the time come that ye shall be no longer known? God of heaven! even then it must be remembered that such things have been. It must be written in books. It must be told in tradition, that men were found to chain their fellow-creatures with heavy bars of iron, to make them linger out the bright space given them for activity and enjoyment in dungeons and in fetters, till the dull flame was extinguished, and dust returned to dust. Would to heaven that there were no such thing as history, to perpetuate, even unto times when man shall have purified his heart from the filthy baseness of these days, the memory of such enormous deeds as fetters like that record! Out upon it! Was it for this that man learnt to dig the ore from the mine, and forge the hard metal in the fire?—But come, come!

I am forgetting myself!" And he led the way forth along the same path by which Bernard de Rohan had been brought from the chapel. The ponderous doors in the solid rock were all open; but the young cavalier remarked that Corse de Leon closed them one by one behind him, till at length they stood in the open air at the foot of the hill.

It were difficult, nay, impossible, to describe the sensations which the first breath of that free air produced in Bernard de Rohan. It would require to have been a captive, and yet full of the spirit of freedom, to have contemplated long imprisonment, and to be suddenly set free, even to comprehend what he then felt. His sensations, however, found vent but in one exclamation—"Thank God!" he said, and followed his companion, who now, with rapid strides, climbed the opposite side of the hill, till he reached the spot where he had waited for Bernard de Rohan on the night when first they met. No horses were there, however, and Corse de Leon seated himself on a point of the crag, and seemed about to fall into one of his fits of reverie: but his young companion was not disposed to rest satisfied without some further information.

"Now," he said—"now! You promised to tell me more—you promised to tell me more concerning Isabel. With whom is she? In whose hands is she, if not in those of the Lord of Masseran?"

"She was," replied Corse de Leon—"she was in the hands of your bright friend, the Count de Meyrand."

Bernard de Rohan's hand grasped for the hilt of his sword; but it was gone, and he only muttered the words, "Villain, villain! I thought I heard that treacherous voice. Who shall one depend upon in this world?"

"Upon none of those," replied Corse de Leon, "whom men are accustomed to depend upon. Not upon the gay companion of the wine-cup, who aids us pleasantly to spend our wealth, or to squander our more precious time—not upon him—not upon him, young gentleman! Not upon the smooth spoken and the plausible adviser, who counsels with us on things where our own interest and his are combined, and who uses our exertions and our means to share in our fortune and our success—not upon him, I say—not upon him! Not upon the sweet flatterer, who either dexterously insinuates how virtuous, and great, and good, and wise we are, or who boldly overloads us with praise, in the hope of some, at least, being received—not upon him, I say. Not upon the pander to our vices or our follies, even though he sell his soul to pamper us with gratification—not upon him. Not upon the light wanton, who

yields us what she should refuse, vowing that it is love for us which conquers, when love for many another has gone before —not upon her. Neither on the priest that preaches virtue without practising it; neither upon the soft hypocrite, nor upon the rude hypocrite; neither upon the one who assumes sleek sanctity, nor upon the other who builds the reputation of honesty upon a rough outside. There are some that will weep with you, and some that will laugh with you—some that will discourse, and some that will sport with you; but trust in none but him that you have tried, but him whom you know to be honest to himself, and who has proved himself honest to you.—We were speaking of the Count de Meyrand. That he has betrayed you and deceived you most shamefully is his fault, not yours, for though you believed him honest, you did not weakly trust him. It were well when you find him, to nail his ears to the door-post, but still you have nothing to reproach yourself with. I trust, however, that sweet and good lady is, by this time, freed from his hands, for one who loves her very well has undertaken that part of the task."

"But how?" exclaimed Bernard de Rohan, "how came she in his power at all?"

Corse de Leon replied briefly, but with sufficient detail to show his hearer at one glance all that had taken place in regard to Isabelle de Brienne since he had seen her. The deep and bitter indignation that gathered at the young cavalier's heart, as his companion went on, was not of a nature that wasted itself in many words. "This must be looked to," he said—"this must be looked to! and now, my friend, to think of this dear girl's escape. Can we trust to good Father Willand?—Not his faith, I mean, but his power. He is there, it would seem, alone, unaided, unsupported, to cope with a man artful, rich, powerful, and numerously followed."

"We may trust him, I am sure," replied the other. "This Count's art, like all pitiful art, will help to deceive himself; and in quiet wisdom he cannot compete with the good priest. Besides, Father Willand is not so unsupported as you think. It may seem strange to you to hear, but many of your own men, nay, I believe, all, are with him, or round about him."

"No," replied Bernard de Rohan, "that surprises me not. Most of them are born within sight of the lands of Brienne —most of them have often seen and know her well, and there is none who has seen her that would not willingly sacrifice life to serve her."

Corse de Leon smiled with somewhat of a melancholy expression. In life, when we have lost any of those sweet

delusions which, like the radiant colours of the morning sky, clothe, at the dawning of our youth, thin air itself and unsubstantial vapours—nay, perhaps, even the cloudy home of the future storm, with loveliness and radiance, and the most glowing hues of heaven's own golden treasury—when we have lost those sweet delusions, I say, and any one with whom they still remain speaks of the reality of things whose emptiness we have proved, how sad, how profoundly sad is the contrast suddenly presented to us, of what we were and what we are !—how melancholy is the conviction of the emptiness of our dream-like life! And yet there is something sweet which mingles even with our sadness, to see others enjoying and believing what we can no longer enjoy or believe, something ennobling and elevating that shares in our melancholy, if the feeling of how unreal are life's best joys lead us to sigh for those that are more true and lasting.

Bernard de Rohan saw not the expression upon the countenance of his companion, although the night was clear and bright, and sufficient light remained in the heavens to make even small objects visible; but his eyes were at that moment fixed upon the castle of Masseran, and more especially upon one of the outstanding towers to the north-east, separated from the rest of the building by a space of two or three hundred yards, and only attached to it by walls and some minor fortifications. In that tower there appeared a great light, at first streaming through some of the upper loop-holes only. After a moment or two, however, it became brighter and brighter, and poured through all the windows of the story below. Bernard de Rohan could almost have imagined that as he gazed he saw flames come forth and lick the dark stone-work of the tower; and he was soon confirmed in the belief that it was so, by the wreaths of pale white smoke which began to ascend into the dark air and in a minute or two formed a cloud above the tower, acquiring a red and ominous hue as the fire below increased.

"Look there—look there!" he exclaimed, catching Corse de Leon's arm; but even as he spoke, the roof of the tower fell in, and a pyramid of flame shot upward into the sky.

"Yes, I see," replied Corse de Leon; "but here come the horses! and we must go quickly to the spot where I trust we shall find her whom you seek for. Then, get you across the frontier into France as soon as may be. Your own men will be sufficient to protect you, and will be glad to see you, for notwithstanding that they may, as you think, love your fair Isabel well, they would not have gone unless we had put a light deceit upon them, and had left them to think,

more than told them it was so, that you and the lady were together. Those I have with me here dare not set foot within that land, and the other friends I have are far distant. That was the reason I did not make her free myself, and punish that slight traitor as he deserves."

While he spoke, three or four horsemen appeared, leading two other horses, and without taking any further notice of the conflagration, Corse de Leon put his foot in the stirrup, and springing into the saddle, rode on towards the little inn which we have often before had occasion to mention.

The young cavalier followed his example; but before they had gone a hundred yards, a loud explosion took place, which shook the rocks around, and echoed afar through the valley. Their horses started at the sound, and Bernard and his companion instantly turned their eyes towards the castle of Masseran. The burning tower had now lost all shape and form, though part of the walls still remained, with the fire clinging to them in various places.

"Do you know what that is?" demanded Corse de Leon; and ere Bernard de Rohan could reply, he went on. "It is an act of folly worthy of a king or a prime minister. There are people in that castle," he said, "who, knowing of my coming and of your escape, have done the act, the effects of which you see flaming yonder, in order that the tower may fall in and crush the dungeon into which they had thrust you, solely to prevent the Lord of Masseran from discovering how you have escaped. Thus it is with the world; every one act of weakness, of folly, or of crime, we judge must be followed by another, to conceal or to justify it. Let men or ministers place themselves in a dangerous situation by some capital fault, and then they think expediency requires them to commit another to obviate the effects of the first, forgetting that each fault is written down in the two eternal books—the Book of Fate, God's servant, and the Book of God himself; and that there must be a reckoning, a terrible reckoning, for the whole amount, in this world and in the next. Let us ride on."

CHAPTER XIV.

We must now entirely change the scene. The spot is no longer the same—the actors different. From the mountains of Savoy, the feudal castle, the lonely chapel, and the humble inn, let us turn to the capital of France, her stately

palaces and the gay and glittering hall where laughed and revelled the bright, the brave, the fair, and the witty of that splendid epoch which began with Francis the First, and ended with his immediate successor. The personages, too, have changed with the scene. The young warrior and his fair bride—the wily Italian and the supercilious and unprincipled Count de Meyrand, are no longer before us. Even good Father Willand himself is left behind, and one for whom we owe no slight affection, Corse de Leon, is for the time off the stage.

At the door—or rather we may say beyond the door, for they were not actually in the chamber—stood two of the King's guard, with their halberts resting on their shoulders, embroidered on which appeared the well-known cognisance of the salamander. They were there merely to perform the place of a living gate, barring the way against any one who would enter, till such time as the orders of the King threw open the halls of the Louvre.

Henry himself, in the prime of his years, graceful, handsome, vigorous, with a countenance full of fire, but still kindly and good humoured, stood at the farther end of the large and nearly vacant reception-room, close to one of the windows, which looked out upon the river Seine, speaking with a lady, on whose appearance we may well be expected to pause for a moment. That lady was the celebrated Diana of Poitiers; and though the period had by this time passed by when her dazzling beauty captivated all eyes as well as those of her royal lover, she was certainly still very handsome. But she had also in her countenance an expression of power and resolution, of quickness of understanding and of sparkling vivacity, which at once displayed many of the chief points of her character. As one stood and looked at her, and saw the play of her fine features, the rapid changes, the sudden lighting up of the eyes, the occasional look of intense eagerness, the shade of momentary meditation, succeeded by the bright smile, the gay laugh, the eyes cast up to heaven, it was easy to understand what manifold powers of charming and persuading lay beneath, and to perceive that, whatever might have been at any time the mere beauty of feature and expression, the chief loveliness of that lovely countenance must ever have been in its wonderful variety.

What was it that moved her now, what was the eager scheme that she was urging upon the King with such a host of wiles, and charms, and graces, that it was hardly possible to expect that he should resist? Lo! how she hangs upon his arm with those two fair hands, and gazes up into his face

with those speaking eyes! Now comes a shade of vexation over her brow. One hand drops from his arm. Her head is partly turned away: a tear dims the eye for an instant, then leaves it brighter than before. Now, again, how merrily she laughs, with the clear joyous ringing laugh that we so seldom hear but from the lips of infancy; and then again that look of bright and eloquent thoughtfulness, while with her extended hand she argues with the monarch on some mighty theme, and carries high conviction on her lofty brow! What a wonderful picture does she form there, even at this very moment, changing by her words the destinies of Europe, and with smiles, and tears, and laughter, and high thoughts, all mingled in a wondrous antidote, curing one of those spoilt children of fortune, that we call kings, of that venomous and pestilential sickness, the love of war!

"Well," said the King—"well, you have triumphed. He shall have the powers, although it goes against my soul to yield anything to that cold and haughty Spaniard. What though fortune have, with all her fickleness, left at the last a momentary balance in the scale against France, have we not already retrieved much, and are we not daily retrieving?"

"True, sire, true," replied Diana of Poitiers—"your armies are retrieving all that was once lost. But your country, sire, alas! your country is not. France suffers, France groans even, while Spain is wounded, and each blow that you strike at the enemy but injures yourself far more."

The King was about to reply, but she stopped him eagerly:—"I am foolish to argue with you," she continued. "You have said I have triumphed, you have said I shall have the powers; and though he may conquer me in argument, my Henry's word is never broken. Besides," she added, "have I not a private suit to be heard and granted also?"

"Ha!" said the King, after pausing, thoughtfully for a moment or two, as if he were still unconvinced, and unwilling to leave the subject on which they had just been conversing—"Ha! I had forgot! You did mention some private suit—what, I remember not now, sweet Diana. But yet it is hard even to hear of peace after defeat. Were we just hot from victory—were we flushed with triumph, and our enemy reduced to lowly supplication—then, indeed, then we might hear of terms of peace, and grant them liberally and willingly. But after this accursed battle of St. Laurence—after so total, signal, and terrible a defeat—the constable himself taken—one half of the nobility of the land wounded or slain—our soldiers scattered, and our provinces invaded—it is bitter indeed to hear the name of peace."

"As bitter to Henry's heart," replied the lady, "as the sound of war to many another man. But you have promised, sire. You have promised Montmorency the full powers, and —you have forgotten my petition."

"Well, well," said the King with a sigh—"what is your petition? I know that you have no private interest in this matter, Diana. You never were a friend of Montmorency."

The lady coloured slightly, but replied at once. "I never was his friend, sire, while haughty fortune smiled upon him, and when he urged measures harsh and injurious to the country upon your majesty; but I will own that I am his friend now, when, bearing his adversity with calmness and with dignity, he would fain persuade your majesty to that which is most necessary for the safety of your realm. So much, indeed, am I his friend, your majesty, now, that I have promised to mingle our families together by the marriage of our sweet Henrietta with his son Damville.—Nay, start not, sire; I told you of this before."

"Did you?" exclaimed the King, "did you? I recollect it not. Yet now, methinks, I do remember something thereof; but I must have been thinking of other things. How can I consent to such a contract?" continued the King. "Recollect, dear lady! Is there not a story current of Damville, like his brother, having bound himself by a secret marriage to an Italian woman?"

"There is some tale of the kind, sire," replied the Duchess of Valentinois, "but I believe without foundation. Even were it so, however, sire," she continued eagerly, "what matters it, in truth? The connexion has long ceased: the pope will annul the marriage instantly; and not many months ago your majesty vowed that you would give an edict rendering clandestine marriages of no effect, and declaring all illegal, but such as have the full consent of the nearest surviving relative of both parties, always under your majesty's good pleasure."

"I recollect," replied the King. "The edict was drawn up, but never signed, because, as it deeply affected ecclesiastical matters, it was thought best to have the sanction of our holy father in Rome, and he made manifold objections. But that edict, even had it issued could not affect the past."

"Your majesty will pardon me," replied the lady. "It had a clause which rendered it retrospective—at least, I am so informed, in a letter which I received not many hours ago, from your faithful subject the good Count of Meyrand, whom you entrusted to carry the edict to Rome.—Had it not that retrospective sense," she added, eagerly, "the hopes and ex-

pectations of Montmorency and myself would both be very bitterly disappointed."

The King's brow grew somewhat cloudy, and she added, suddenly, "Not for myself, sire!—I speak not for myself, and with no reference to this proposed marriage between Henriette de la Mark and the young Damville. But there is one thing for which I know the good Constable has long sighed. The duke, his eldest son, is more ambitious than your majesty dreams of."

"Indeed!" said the King, with a slight smile. "What do you mean fair lady? Is his ambition dangerous to the state?"

"Nay, nay, sire—not so," replied the Duchess, with a smile, seeing that the King, while affecting ignorance, in reality understood what she meant. "There is a certain lovely lady bearing the same name as my more humble self, and somewhat near to the affections of your royal person—near, even as a daughter, some men say. She has now wept for some time in widowhood; and the young Duke of Montmorency, daringly priding himself upon the royal blood that flows also in his veins, has ventured to sigh for this fair lady's hand. But the great impediment is that fatal contract which he signed with Mademoiselle de Pienne, without his father's knowledge and consent."

"I have heard something of this before," said the King, to whom the idea of uniting his natural daughter to the high race of Montmorency was not a little grateful. "But does the Constable desire this marriage for his son? If so, why did he not speak long since?"

"Most humbly, sire, does he desire it," replied the lady; "and has commissioned me to sue, by every means of persuasion and entreaty, that your majesty would condescend to grant your consent to the union of his son with Madame de Farnese. He over-rates my means, I know; but he does calculate that your majesty has some affection still for me, as well as some regard and esteem for him."

"Much, much for both, dear lady," replied the King; and then, falling into a fit of thought, he added, as if speaking to himself, "This marriage is most unfortunate.—But that a rash boy should pay, by a whole life of celibacy and regret, for the idle folly of signing his name to a promise extracted from him by an artful woman, is indeed too much. I would fain see the draft of the edict which was proposed."

"Here is the Chancellor, sire, hard by," replied the lady, pointing to a group of three or four persons who had followed her into the hall at her first entrance, but who had remained

gathered together in a group at the other end of the chamber, conversing in a low voice. "Here is the Chancellor, sire: perhaps he may have a copy of the edict with him now."

"Perchance he may, fair dame," replied the King, laying his hand fondly upon her shoulder, and smiling, at the same time, at the evident preparation of the whole affair—"perchance he may. Ho! my good Chancellor. We would fain speak with you here a while."

At the very first word the King addressed to him, a tall and somewhat meagre man, in the rich and gorgeous habit of one of the princes of the Roman church, took a step forward from the rest of the group, and, bowing low, advanced towards the King. He was dark and pale in countenance, and his features were of an Italian cast, while a look of shrewd, calm cunning, which that cast is so well calculated to assume, was the predominant expression.

"His majesty, my lord Cardinal," said the duchess, addressing the famous John Bertrandi, and having marked well the shrewd smile upon the King's countenance—"his majesty, my lord Cardinal, would fain see a copy of that edict referring to clandestine marriages, which was drawn up some months ago, but never signed; I besought you this morning to seek for it. Has it been found?"

"I have it here, madam," replied the Chancellor at once, opening a portfolio which he carried under his arm—"may I present it to your majesty?" and, selecting from amongst a number of papers which the portfolio contained, the one that was required at the moment, he put it into the hands of Henry the Second.

The King took and read it attentively. "And is this, my lord," he demanded, "in all due form, and ready for promulgation?"

"It is, sire," replied the Chancellor: "wanting nothing but your majesty's signature and the seal."

Henry paused thoughtfully. "And is it," he asked—"and is it altogether, and in all parts, in strict accordance with the laws of France?"

"*Que veut le roi, veut la loi*," replied the Chancellor. "What the King wills, the law wills;" and, with that tyrannical axiom, the attempted enforcement of which, in France, has caused more bloodshed than perhaps any other line that ever was written, John Bertrandi satisfied his conscience in sanctioning that which was contrary to the true spirit of all law.

Henry himself, however, was not satisfied! Although it is so easy for base counsellors—on whom be eternal shame—

to find specious arguments in favour of those things which monarchs wish, however evil; and although it certainly was the case, that the King of France himself, eagerly desiring the marriage of his natural daughter with the heir of Montmorency, had potent tempters in his own bosom to second the words of Bertrandi, still he was not satisfied that the retrospective act proposed to him was right. He looked first at the Cardinal; next turned his eyes for a moment to the countenance of Diana of Poitiers; smiled doubtfully, and then said, "Put it up, my lord Cardinal, put it up! I will take one day more to consider of it. Nay, look not grieved, fair dame, it shall have favourable consideration. Forget not that both our wishes run in the same way. Now let us speak of other things, Diana.—Do you come to our gay hall to-night?—Nay, you must not be absent," he added, seeing that the Duchess looked down somewhat mournfully; "Henriette de la Mark must dance a gaillarde with her lover Damville."

"But can her lover ever be her husband?" demanded Diana, gazing reproachfully in the King's face, and then adding, with consummate skill in the management of that monarch—"it matters not! Since I have accomplished what I sought for the good of the country, even if I have failed in what I sought for my own pleasure, it matters not! My good lord Chancellor, the King has been pleased to promise that powers shall be immediately granted to the noble Constable of Montmorency to treat with Spain and with the Empire for a good and perfect peace. Let it be said, that this has been obtained by the solicitations of one who could obtain nothing for herself! but still, not to her honour let it be, but to the king's, inasmuch as he overcame in his own heart the love of glory and the thirst of victory for the sake of his good land of France. Will you not, sire," she continued—"will you not order the Chancellor at once to expedite the powers for the good Constable? It cannot be done too rapidly."

"Why so?" demanded Henry. "There is, surely, no such haste."

"Because, sire," replied the lady, "there are two great and fortunate men, whose first wish must be to change your majesty's counsels in this regard. The conqueror of Calais may well have a say in matters of peace and war. The Cardinal of Lorraine is still at your majesty's ear. The purpose may evaporate and pass away, war be continued gloriously and long, and France be ruined."

"Nay, nay," replied the King, looking at the Duchess re-

proachfully—"I am not so vacillating in my purposes. The Guises have not the influence you think."

"They have had the influence, sire," replied Diana, boldly; "they have had the influence to delay, for many months, that very edict, drawn up by the orders of the King himself, for the surety and protection of the French people, and to guard against the evils under which half the noble families of France now smart, from alliances contracted in wild youth with races of inferior blood."

"The Guises had nothing to do with that—have nothing to do with it," replied the King, impatiently. "What interest have they in this matter? I remember, it is true, the Cardinal of Lorraine did oppose the edict, but upon motives of general justice. What interest had he, or his brother either, for or against the edict?"

"To keep down the house of Montmorency," replied Diana of Poitiers. "To blast the expectations of the young Duke, in the hopes which he, perhaps presumptuously, had entertained."

"I believe that it is so, indeed, sire," said the Chancellor. "There is much reason to think that the opposition of our holy father the pope was raised up by the instigations of the Cardinal of Lorraine. You are well aware, sire, that a messenger from the Cardinal outstripped even the Count de Meyrand, and that the latter gentleman found the holy father already prepared to oppose the edict."

"I will think of the matter," said the King again. "If the opposition be but factious, we will give it no head; but I would fain, before I promulgate the edict, have some cause before me to justify it, in which my own personal wishes, and yours, fair lady, are not interested—I must have time for thought upon it. Now let the doors be opened, for we have kept our court too long without."

The doors of the ante-room were accordingly thrown open. The guards, with their halberts, drew back, and in a few minutes the great hall of reception was crowded with the nobles of France. While the King, with affable condescension, received his subjects, spoke with many of them, and smiled upon all, and the buzz of voices, steps, and rustling garments raised a sort of whispering murmur through the halls, the Chancellor was seen speaking, in a low voice, to the Duchess of Valentinois; and some one who was passing heard the latter say, "Not only that, my lord, but the abbey of St. Martin, also, if we succeed. The revenues are twelve thousand crowns a-year."

The Chancellor bowed low, with a humble and obsequious smile, and the Duchess turned to speak to some one else.

CHAPTER XV.

Before a mirror of the most beautiful polish that it was possible to conceive, and a toilet table covered with all the most costly essences and perfumes which could be procured from the four quarters of the globe, appeared the Duchess of Valentinois, seated in a large arm-chair of rich velvet, towards nine o'clock in the evening of the day whereof we have just been speaking. She was clothed in a dressing-gown of silver tissue, and all the stately and somewhat cumbrous apparel of the day had been put off, while, with three maids all busy about her person, she was dressing for the assembly of the court, which was to be held that evening. Nor did she appear in the least the less lovely that she was without any of the additions that dress and ornament sometimes make to beauty; nor, strange to say, did she appear less young when thus unassisted by art, than even when dressed in the most sumptuous mode of the court. The eye of the woman who was combing her long, rich, luxuriant brown hair, detected not one silver thread marking the passing of years amongst the rest. The teeth were as white and pearly as those of youth. The brow and neck without a furrow ploughed by the hand of time.

On a footstool at the lady's feet sat a very lovely girl, bearing in her countenance a slight resemblance to herself. She was already dressed with great splendour, and sat looking up in the face of the Duchess, as if admiring and wondering at the beauty which seemed to set even the great destroyer of all things at defiance.

The Duchess, upon her part, looked down at her with pleasure and affection, calling her, "Ma belle Henriette," and, parting the hair farther away from her brows with her own hands, she said, "You must look your loveliest to-night, Henrietta; for you must do much in the way of captivation."

The girl smiled playfully, and replied, "No, no! that were bad policy; I would rather not look so lovely now as afterwards. His love, at present, I can count upon. But I must try and be more captivating hereafter to keep it when he is my husband."

The Duchess smiled in turn: "Ah, my Henrietta," she

said, "the love of man is not so difficult to keep, if woman do but use the same efforts to retain it that she does to win it. We often make men fickle who would be faithful, thinking that to captivate them once is all-sufficient. How many do I daily see, Henrietta, who take all imaginable pains to win affection, who are gay and cheerful, courteous and kind, willing to please and ready to be pleased, robing themselves, as it were, in small graces and sweet allurements: and who, when the object is attained, cast away, at once, every effort; are dull and cheerless, exacting, sullen, harsh, and then wonder that the won heart is lost more quickly than it was gained! When children catch flies, my Henrietta, they put not down a drop of honey which the insects can eat and fly away. There must be enough honey to keep them, my child."

"It is a lesson that I will remember," replied Henriette de la Mark. "But, as I have always thought, dear lady, that it is happiness we seek, and not admiration, I trust I should never have forgotten that the same means must be taken to keep affection that are used to win it. But, hark! there are manifold sounds below. Surely the guests are not arriving already!"

The question was soon answered; for a moment after, one of the female attendants was called to the door, and returned to tell the Duchess that two gentlemen had arrived in haste, and anxiously desired to speak with her. She turned towards the woman with somewhat of angry scorn in her countenance, asking if they had been told that she was at her toilet. The woman replied in the affirmative; but that they had nevertheless urged the important nature of their business.

"Bid them send me their names," replied the Duchess, after thinking for a moment. "Meyrand's letter declared that he would soon be here. Perhaps, he has come himself."

It was as she thought. But the other name which the servant brought back was that of the Lord of Masseran.

"Bid them wait but a moment," replied the Duchess. "I will not be long. Tie up my hair, Laurette, in a large knot.—Any how, any how; but be quick!"

Then, drawing the dressing-gown more closely round her, and preceded by one of her women bearing a light, she descended to a saloon below, making a sign to Henriette de la Mark to remain till she returned.

Standing near a table in the room which Diana of Poitiers now entered, appeared the tall and graceful Count de Meyrand, and the dark-looking and subtle Marquis of Masseran.

Each, to a certain degree, retained his usual aspect, though neither could entirely banish from his countenance the varied emotions which were busy at his heart. Graceful and dignified in demeanour Meyrand still was. Indeed it was so much a matter of habit with him to act with ease and calm self-possession, that they could never be entirely lost; but still his usual air of indifference was gone, and there was an eager impatience in his eye which marked that strong and busy passions were agitating him within. On the other hand, the look of calm subtilty, which was the reigning expression of the countenance of the Lord of Masseran, but which we have already seen, on more than one occasion, give way to fiercer passions, had now yielded to an expression of restless disquietude, while his eye turned sharp and flashing at every sound.

On the appearance of Madame de Valentinois, the Count advanced with signs of low and humble homage, and raised the hand which she proffered him respectfully to his lips. The Lord of Masseran came a step behind, and then a momentary pause took place. It was broken, however, by the Duchess herself, who was much too impatient to learn the cause of their sudden arrival to wait till it was explained in the course of conversation.

"Welcome to Paris, Monsieur de Meyrand!" she said. "But say, what is it that brings you here at this hour? It must be business of importance, I am sure."

"Nothing but business of immediate moment, madam, would have induced me thus to trespass upon you," replied the Count; "but I have myself arrived within this half hour in the capital. I came, I confess, with some wrongful suspicions of my good friend the Marquis of Masseran here, in regard to the lady of whom I wrote to you. I fancied that he had been instrumental in preventing me from executing my purpose of bringing her with all speed to the presence of the King. His manner and his solemn assurances, however, madam, both show me that I was mistaken; and it would appear ——"

"But stay, stay, Monsieur de Meyrand," said the Duchess; "first tell me exactly what is the case, and how you and Monsieur de Masseran are interested in the business. I remember well Mademoiselle de Brienne, of whom you speak, and a sweet girl she was, well fitted to set any cavalier's heart on fire, so that I can easily conceive that yours was touched, Monsieur de Meyrand, with that same flame of love. But if all friends agree, the lady surely can never have such great objections to yourself as not to be easily won by less forcible

means than those you seem to have been using. I will speak with her—I will see what can be done.—Let me thank you, however, my good lord, for the tidings you sent me concerning the edict: I have turned them this day to good advantage. But still the King is not easily won in this matter."

"By Heaven! madam," replied Meyrand, vehemently, "he must be won, and that right soon, or all will go wrong with us. But hear me, dearest lady—hear me out. You have a faint and very wrong idea of all this affair. We are all deeply concerned—and, pardon me for saying it—but your own wishes and excellent views are closely and intimately connected with our objects and purposes. You ask for a frank and candid explanation—you shall have it in a very few words. The Lord of Masseran and I are equally, but somewhat differently, interested in this matter. I am moved, in some degree, as you are pleased to say, by love. Yes!" he added, "it is so!—by love the most strong and passionate; and yet, I know not why, or how, but something very like hatred mingles with it—deep and bitter indignation at having been made the sport of a mere girl, and determination to force her to be mine or die——"

He paused, and bit his lip, and a shade of dissatisfaction came over the brow of Diana of Poitiers as she listened; but the next moment the Count went on, with a slight sneer.

"The Lord of Masseran is affected otherwise. He, madam, as you know, married the mother of this fair dame; and to this bright Isabel, descend, at that mother's death, certain fair estates close to the frontier line of France and Savoy."

"I understand—I understand," replied Diana of Poitiers, interrupting him. "The Count of Meyrand may be easy in his dealings about those estates, if he but obtain the hand of the fair lady. Is it not so, my good lords?"

"Something of the kind, madam," replied the Count.

"A treaty of partition! ha?" continued the lady. "Now for the obstacle, and for the manner in which this affects me?"

"The obstacles are somewhat difficult to be encountered, madam," joined in the Lord of Masseran; "especially as this noble Count is somewhat of a suspicious nature. But, to make a long tale short, madam, there was, it seems, in years long past, a promise made by the old Count of Brienne that his daughter should marry a certain young nobleman, named Bernard de Rohan. That promise was foolishly committed to writing; but I hold that it was of course con-

ditional, and requires to be confirmed by the consent of the mother. The young gentleman we speak of has been long warring with the armies in Italy; but, called thence, as I believe, by the young lady herself, who has a marvellous love for her own way, he appeared in Savoy some short time ago. I absented myself for a few days from my own home, making a pretence of coming to Paris, in order to see what would take place. But although I had good information of all that passed, what between the young lady's wit and the youth's impudence, they had very nearly won the race. Myself and Monsieur de Meyrand, here, surprised them in the very celebration of a clandestine marriage."

"Were they married? Were they married?" demanded the Duchess, eagerly; for, whatever be her own views, woman's heart is rarely without interest in a tale of love.

"There was a ring upon the young lady's finger," replied the Marquis of Masseran, while the Count de Meyrand stood silent, and bit his lip; "farther we know not."

"What did you do next?" exclaimed the lady, with an impatient look, which neither of her two companions thought very favourable to their cause.

"Why," replied the Lord of Masseran, "we separated them, of course; and I carried the young lady some way through the mountains, arranging, in fact, a little sort of drama or mystery with my good friend the Count, wherein he played the part of deliverer, rescued the young lady from my hands, and according to our agreement was bringing her here to Paris, in the trust that you, from wise motives, which the Count knew you to possess, would support the right of the mother to dispose of her daughter's hand to whom she pleased."

The Marquis, in delivering this account, had paused and hesitated several times, and Diana of Poitiers had remarked that he avoided carefully all mention of the after-fate of Bernard de Rohan.

"What has become," she asked, at length, interrupting him, and fixing her eye full upon his face—"what has become of the young Baron de Rohan, sir?"

The Lord of Masseran turned his look to the Count de Meyrand, without answering; but the Duchess went on sternly and impetuously, "I insist upon knowing, sir, what was done in regard to Monsieur de Rohan. You surprised him at the very altar, you say!—You have gone too far not to say more!"

"Why, of course, madam, it was necessary to separate them," replied the Count de Meyrand. "Monsieur de Rohan

was carried into the château of my friend, Monsieur de Masseran, who kindly and liberally undertakes to provide the young gentleman with board and lodging for a certain time. No evil was done him, though the very act that he was performing might well have justified more violence than was used."

"In short, sir," said the Duchess, addressing the Lord of Masseran, sternly—"in short, sir, you have imprisoned one of the King's very best officers and most faithful subjects—the right hand of the Maréchal de Brissac—and one who has rendered himself famous in the wars of Italy, and without whose assistance the difficulties which surround the Marshal in Piedmont would be terribly augmented."

"Madam," replied the Count de Meyrand, with a slight sneer, which no prudence could repress, at the reputed tenderness of the Duchess towards Brissac, "had we known that Monsieur de Rohan was so absolutely necessary to your graceful friend, we would have sent him under a strong escort across the mountains, for time was all that we wanted."

"He must be speedily set at liberty," answered the Duchess; "for I cannot have it said that anything in which I take a share is connected with a transaction so detrimental to the service of the King; and now, Monsieur de Meyrand, show me in what way you think I am interested in this affair."

"Why, madam, you must clearly see——" said the Count.

"It matters not what I clearly see, my lord," exclaimed the Duchess, interrupting him. "Give me your own showing of the matter."

"Why thus it is," replied the Count. "Since I had the honour of bearing to Rome the copy of an edict proposed by the King, you have three or four times done me the great favour of writing to me, and consulting with me in regard to the opposition made to that edict, and to the best means of inducing the King to promulgate it. Now, madam, one clause in that edict annuls all existing marriages which have been contracted without the consent of parents or guardians; and you did me the honour to reveal to me that such a clause was absolutely necessary to the proposed marriage between the Duke of Montmorency and the King's daughter, Madame de Farnese, and to that between the Constable's second son, the Duc Damville, and your fair relation, Mademoiselle de la Mark. That clause is equally necessary to me and to Monsieur de Masseran, in order that the clandestine marriage of Mademoiselle de Brienne with the Baron de Rohan being annulled, she may, with her mother's consent, give her hand

to me. Thus, madam, what I pray and beseech you to do is, as the views of both tend absolutely to the same point, to give us your most zealous aid and co-operation in persuading the King to promulgate this edict at once."

Diana of Poitiers paused for a moment in intense thought ere she answered, while the two noblemen stood gazing upon her in silence. "I will do so," she replied, at length; "but in the first place, Monsieur de Rohan must be set at liberty."

"Madam, that is impossible," exclaimed the Lord of Masseran. "Were he set at liberty, all our plans and prospects are at an end together. His very first act would be to seek this rash, imprudent girl, who thinks herself fully justified by her father's written consent; and depend upon it he would soon find means of discovering her, though we cannot."

"Why, in the name of Heaven, where is she?" demanded the Duchess. "Why, you said but now, Monsieur de Masseran, that you left her in the Count's hands that he might bring her to Paris."

"Ay, but she escaped from his hands, madam," replied the Lord of Masseran. "Whether the Count is quite innocent of all knowledge of female wiles, or whether he had been somewhat harsh and importunate with her, I cannot tell; but at the end of the very first day's journey she contrived to escape from him, how, or when, no one can discover. I had come on to Paris, in order to justify the detention of Bernard de Rohan, and in fact to give an account of my whole conduct to the King; but the good Count, thinking that I must have some hand in the lady's flight, followed me hither, as rapidly as possible, without taking sufficient time to inquire after her on the spot."

The Duchess heard him to an end, but her mind had run on far before her; and she was gazing thoughtfully upon the ground, with various feelings contending more strongly in her bosom than her two companions imagined. Bernard de Rohan, she well knew, was the dearest friend of one who certainly possessed her highest esteem—perhaps her highest affection—the Maréchal de Brissac, and she loved not to take any share in injuring or grieving him. We must say even more. Not being naturally of a harsh or unkindly disposition, she was anything but disposed to abet such machinations against two people who loved each other; and she could not but feel at her heart that there existed between the Lord of Masseran and the Count de Meyrand a dark and shameless conspiracy for frustrating the intentions of the Count de Brienne, and thwarting the affections of his

daughter. All these considerations opposed themselves to the very thought of aiding them in their purposes; but yet her own views, her own dearest objects, were to be obtained by the same means which tended to promote theirs; and she clearly saw, that if, without exposing, as she might do, the real views and purposes of the parties concerned, she were to bring this case before the King, as a new instance of a marriage in opposition to the parent's consent, she would instantly obtain the promulgation of the edict which was so necessary to her own designs. She paused, then, and thought, considering, in the first place, the opposing motives which led her this way and that, and afterwards asking herself whether she could not combine the two—whether it was not possible to use the fact of this clandestine marriage in order to obtain the King's signature to the edict, without ultimately separating the hands of Bernard de Rohan and Isabel de Brienne. A few moments convinced her that she could do so. The edict would, of course, annul their marriage; but then she thought, "the great services of this young cavalier, the friendship of Brissac, the support of Montmorency, the father's written consent, will surely be enough to obtain for him afterwards the hand of this fair girl from the King himself; at least, my management shall render these things sufficient;" and, trusting that it would be so, she resolved upon that evil policy of employing bad means, in the hopes of directing them to good results, a policy which has seldom, if ever, yet failed to end in misery and ruin.

"What says the mother?" demanded the Duchess, after this long pause.

"Oh, she says the same as myself, of course," replied the Lord of Masseran.

"Of course!" replied the lady, her lip curling slightly as she spoke. "I had forgotten!—Is she in Paris?"

"She is here," replied the Lord of Masseran; "and not only ready, but eager to declare that this marriage has been against her will."

"Indeed!" said the Duchess: "and the brother? There is a youth I have seen about the court—a gay, thoughtless, high-spirited lad, who gained some renown under this very Baron de Rohan. What says he to the marriage?"

"Oh! he is too young and thoughtless," replied the Count de Meyrand. "He has been asked nothing on the subject, though there is reason to fear, we must not deny, that he would give his voice in favour of his old companion."

"But one thing is clear and certain," added the Lord of

Masseran. "His consent was not asked to the marriage; therefore it was without his approbation and against the mother's."

"So far so good," replied Diana of Poitiers. "Now mark me, gentlemen, you must leave the whole conduct of this business to me; and if you pledge yourselves to act exactly as I am about to dictate, I, on my part, will pledge myself to obtain the promulgation of an edict annulling this marriage within twelve hours from this time."

A glad smile lighted up the face of the Count de Meyrand. But the Lord of Masseran asked, in a low sweet tone, "Pray what are the conditions, madam?"

"These," replied the Duchess, at once. "And, remember, gentlemen, that I am one who will not be trifled with; so that if you fail to perform exactly your part, you shall find your whole schemes fall about your heads, and, perhaps, crush you in the ruins thereof. The very moment that I have obtained that edict, Monsieur de Masseran, without the loss of a single hour, you shall depart from Paris, and set this young cavalier, Bernard de Rohan, at liberty.—Do not interrupt me!—This is indispensable. You can leave the Marchioness behind. In the next place, to guard against the evil consequences which I see you anticipate, you shall engage the young Count of Brienne to set off instantly in search of his sister, in order to bring her at once to Paris to the presence of the King. You, Monsieur de Meyrand, shall not make the slightest attempt to seek for her yourself, nor shall you at present quit Paris. But this young gentleman, instructed that this edict annuls the clandestine marriage, and is upon the very point of being signed, shall go as the guardian of his sister's honour, and at the same time as the friend of Monsieur de Rohan, to bring her safely back to the protection of her mother and of his majesty. His own sense of what is right, under such circumstances, will be a sufficient guarantee that he do not suffer his sister to remain an hour with a man who is not her husband; and now ——"

"But, madam," said the Count de Meyrand, "if you will pardon me for thus rudely interrupting you, I would point out one slight obstacle to the arrangement you propose, which renders it absolutely impossible, and may make it expedient that I should go myself. Henry of Brienne is at Grenoble, I understand."

"Well, then, sir," said the Duchess, imperiously, "some one else must go. *You* must not! Were the other the lowest valet in my household, he is more fit than you are to bring this lady to Paris."

The Lord of Masseran had remained silent till the Duchess's answer was made, but he then joined in the conversation again, in one of his sweetest tones, saying, "The Count is mistaken, dear madam, Henry of Brienne is in Paris. He thought of going to Grenoble, but did not go. He was with his sweet mother not an hour ago."

"Well, then, hear me!" said the Duchess. "Do you undertake, Monsieur de Meyrand, not to set out upon this search at all?" The Count laid his hand upon his heart, bowed with mock humility, and replied, "Who ever yet resisted your commands? Nay, I am not jesting! I give you my promise, madam."

"Then, my Lord of Masseran," continued the Duchess, "all I have to say is this:—Wait here for five minutes, till I write a note above. Give it to Henry of Brienne; afford him every direction and hint for finding his sister, and bringing her at once to Paris. As soon as he has set out, come with your fair lady to the palace to offer your complaint regarding this clandestine marriage to his majesty. I will take care that you shall have an immediate hearing, and I pledge myself that the edict shall be signed this night. Tomorrow morning, at daybreak, you depart alone, post-haste, to liberate Bernard de Rohan. Is it not so?" And she fixed her keen eye firm upon him.

"It is, madam," replied the Lord of Masseran, better pleased at the arrangement than she knew.

"As for you, Meyrand," she added, with a smile, "take my advice: come also to the court, appear totally unconcerned in this whole business, and press your suit upon the King, if you so please, when the edict is signed."

"A woman's policy is always the best, madam," replied the Count; "and in this instance I shall follow it to the letter."

"I must now leave you," said the lady, "for I am already late. Wait here for the note, and then let us to our several parts with all speed."

In less than the time that she had specified, a servant brought in an open note, which contained these words:—

"Diana, Duchess of Valentinois, to Henry Count of Brienne, greeting:

"These are to inform you that your sister, Isabel de Brienne has contracted a clandestine marriage with Bernard Baron de Rohan; and that, inasmuch as this night an edict will be signed annulling all marriages of the sort, it is absolutely necessary to your own honour and to that of your

sister that you should immediately proceed to find and bring her to Paris till the farther pleasure of the King be known. The Baron de Rohan having been arrested the moment that the marriage was celebrated, will be set at liberty immediately; but it is requisite that you should prevent all communication between him and your sister until it be authorized by his majesty."

The Lord of Masseran made no scruple of reading the contents, and showing them to the Count de Meyrand, who marked them with a smile, and adding, "We must make quite sure of the youth, however," led the way from the apartments of the Duchess.

CHAPTER XVI.

In the great hall of the Louvre, the princes, the nobles, and the ladies of France—all who had a right from their rank and station to be present at the great festivals of the court, and all who could by any means obtain an invitation from the King himself—were assembled before the hour of ten at night, on that occasion to which reference has been made in the last chapter. The monarch himself had not yet appeared, but one of those services which Henry principally required from his great officers was to entertain with affability and kindness those whom the etiquette of his court obliged him to keep waiting; and, on the night of which we speak, the famous Marquis de Vielleville in fact, though not ostensibly, represented the King, and, aided by a number of other gentlemen and officers commissioned so to do, received the court, and endeavoured to make the time of expectation ere the sovereign's arrival pass lightly.

Everything had been done that could be done to give splendour to the apartments, and many of those ornaments and decorations which we attribute to the taste of modern days, but which in fact have but come back again in the constant revolutions of fashion, were displayed on this occasion to render the scene of royal festivity bright and exciting. Some of the rooms were blazing with light, and covered with every sort of ornament of gold and silver: rich draperies were hanging from the walls, banners waving over head, garlands festooning the cornices, and music floating on the air. In others again, by some means, a green hue had been given

to the light, and it had been shaded and kept down to a kind of soft twilight by flowers and green branches; while a cool wind found its way in through open casements and well-watered plants, and a stillness reigned upon the air, only broken by the far-off sound of the music, the murmur of distant voices, and the sighing of the night air through the gardens.

We shall pause no more, however, upon the decorations of that gay scene, inasmuch as so to do would be merely to give description without an object; for we have no reason to assign why the reader should bear any part thereof in mind. It is principally with the great hall we have to do, but, more especially still, with the people that were in it. Shortly after ten, the King himself, with his Queen, the famous Catherine de Medicis, several of his children—amongst whom were three destined to be kings, and two queens of mighty nations—entered the hall, and took his place towards the head of the room.

It was very customary in those times to give the balls of the court in open day; and, though it certainly would strike us as somewhat strange to see dancing take place except by candlelight—unless, indeed, it were upon the greensward, where the smiling look of Nature herself seems to justify and to call for that expression of exuberant life which she first taught in the world's young days—yet then as gay and as merry dances as any that we now behold, took place in painted saloons, under the somewhat too bright and searching eye of the sun. The whole of that morning, however, had been spent either in business or in festivities of another kind, and the present was one of those more rare occasions selected, as we have said, for a ball at night.

Shortly after the King entered the room he spoke a few words to the young Count Duilly, then celebrated for his skill and grace in the dance; and he, making his way to the spot where the musicians were placed, communicated to them the orders of the King. What was called the *Danse Royale* was then played; and Henry himself, graceful and distinguished in every sport and exercise, opened the ball in person. Shortly after, another dance was played, and all who were, or believed themselves to be, the most skilful of the court, hastened to figure in the galliarde. Upon the execution of that marvellous performance, the galliarde, however, perhaps the less we say the better; for it is to be acknowledged that the various names of the wonderful steps danced—the desportes, capriolles, turns and returns, fleurettes, close and dispersed gamberottes, &c.—convey as little definite idea

of what was really done to our own minds as they would to those of most of our readers. It was all very successful, no doubt; and there is much reason to believe, from the account which Monsieur de Vielleville himself wrote upon the occasion, that many a young lady's heart was pierced through and through by the graces of particular cavaliers.

The King himself took part in the dance, as we have said, but it was a dignified part; and, having set the example, he retired from it as speedily as possible. When he had done, he looked round, as if searching for some face he had missed, and his eye soon fell upon the fair Duchess of Valentinois, whom he had not beheld before; for, to say the truth, she had just entered, taking advantage of the general movement round the galliarde to come in without attracting much attention. Her countenance bore an expression of such unusual gravity, that Henry himself, ere he resumed the place in the saloon where he usually stood on such occasions, paused and spoke to her; first playfully scolding Henrietta de la Mark for not having joined the dancers, and then asking the Duchess in a lower tone if anything had gone amiss.

Diana smiled, and replied, "No, sire, nothing exactly amiss; but I have had visiters this evening at an unusual hour, and they have been pressing me to obtain for them an audience of your majesty on this very night, regarding matters of much importance."

"Nay, why should that cloud your fair brow?" said the King, in the same low tone: "I will give them audience ere I go to bed, if my so doing will please you, bright queen of night. If they can put it off, however, let them come to-morrow, and your name shall open the doors of the cabinet to them, be they the lowliest in the land."

"That they are not, sire," replied Diana. "They are high enough to present themselves here this night even unbidden; but I fear that to-morrow will not do; for, upon your majesty's reply to them, a courier must depart at once for the South. Still let me say, ere they come forward—for I see them entering now—that it is not their requested audience that makes me somewhat grave—no, nor their pressing for it at an unseasonable hour—but it is that they come to urge upon your majesty the self-same suit I urged this morning; and—as I then saw that for the first time I was doubted and suspected of art, in trying to lead rather than to argue with my King—it may now be thought I have some share in their coming, when, Heaven is my witness, it could take no one more by surprise than myself."

"Nay, but what is all this?" demanded the King, in a

soothing tone; and then, suddenly turning to Mademoiselle de la Mark, he exclaimed—"Lo! Henriette—belle Henriette! here comes Damville, all love and ambergris, to claim your fair hand—for the dance. Go with him, lady! Now, Diane, what is this that agitates you thus?—Faith, I suspect you not, and never have suspected. I did but smile this morning at your eagerness, though natural enough, and to see how we kings find soft leading, and all things prepared to bring us to that which wise or fair counsellors judge is for our good—it is the vice of power, my Diana, it is the vice of power! As men by years reach childhood again, so kings by power fall into weakness.—But that matters not, your wishes were for the best; and, if there was a little management in the matter, there could be but small offence."

"With one so placable as you are, sire," rejoined the Duchess, gazing in his face with a smile; "but the matter is this. There came to me this night the Lord of Masseran,—one of your majesty's faithful adherents in Savoy,—beseeching that I would obtain for him and for his fair lady immediate audience of your majesty, on matters that brook no delay. He, judging wrongly that I had some little credit or influence with you, besought me to urge upon your majesty the immediate promulgation of the edict so long delayed and often spoken of, concerning clandestine marriages; and besought me to tell you the cause of his application. All this I refused to do, telling him that, on the subject of the edict, I had already done my best; that I had pleaded for myself; that I had even pleaded in behalf of what I thought your majesty's best interest; and that, having done so, I could not say a word for any other being on the earth. Thus, sire, all I have to request is, that you would hear him, and judge for yourself."

The expression of Henry's face while she was speaking puzzled, not a little, Diana of Poitiers. The King's brow became for a time dark and heavy, and his eye flashed angrily. But then, again, when he saw that the lady seemed somewhat alarmed by his look, he smiled upon her kindly, as if to mark that any feelings of dissatisfaction which he experienced were not directed towards herself. His real feelings were explained, however, immediately, by his replying in the same low tone, "He is, I believe, a most consummate villain, this Lord of Masseran; and there is good reason to suppose he has been playing false both to France and Savoy. He has the very look of a handsome wolf," the King continued, turning his frowning brow to the part of the room towards which the eyes of Diana of Poitiers directed his in search of

the Lord of Masseran: "I will speak with him presently, however. Let him be taken into the white chamber, next to that in which they serve the confectionery. Send likewise for Bertrandi: he is in my closet. I will join you there in a quarter of an hour. A guard, too, may be wanted before we have done. So, as you pass, bid Beaujolais keep near the door."

Thus saying, the King turned away, and occupied himself with other matters, speaking to the most distinguished persons present, and laughing gaily with many a fair dame as he passed along. The Duchess remained for a short time where he had left her, not only for the purpose of preventing her long conversation with the King from connecting itself in the suspicions of those around with whatever might take place regarding the Lord of Masseran, but also because she had some doubts as to whether she should herself be present or not at the interview between the Savoyard nobleman and the King. Henry had certainly implied that she was to be present. But she had doubts and fears in regard to meddling too much with the matter; and, if she could have trusted to the Lord of Masseran, she certainly would have stayed away.

Trust him, however, she could not; for there was something in his whole aspect, demeanour, and tone, which at once inspired suspicion. Indeed, he did not try to avoid it; for, looking upon skill, cunning, and acuteness as the greatest of human qualities, he made no pretence whatever to either frankness or sincerity. She still hesitated, however, when the Count de Meyrand, dressed in the most splendid and, at the same time, the most tasteful habit that perhaps the whole court that night displayed, passed by her as he retired from the dance. He bowed as he did so with lowly reverence, but, at the same time, with a meaning glance of the eye towards the spot where the Lord of Masseran stood.

"I must watch what takes place myself," thought the Duchess: "I will take no part in the matter, unless there be great need; but I will watch all that is said and done."

She accordingly drew herself gradually back from the circle, and, choosing a moment when some change in the dance produced a momentary confusion, she retired to the room which the King had named.

A minute or two after, an attendant passed through the ball-room, and whispered a few words to the Lord of Masseran, who instantly followed the servant, accompanied by a lady who had continued to stand beside him since his entrance, but to whom he had not addressed more than one or two words during the evening. She was a tall and hand-

some woman, and in her countenance there was certainly some degree of resemblance to the fair Isabel de Brienne. The features, however, though still fine, were all larger and harsher, except the eyes, which were small and of a different colour from those of Isabel, being of a keen eager black. She was pale, and looked somewhat out of health; and, mingling with an air of sternness which sat upon her brow, there was an expression of anxiety and grief which made her countenance a painful one to look upon. It seemed to bear written upon it, in very legible lines, the history of a haughty spirit broken.

When the Lord of Masseran and his wife reached the chamber to which the royal servant conducted them, the Duchess of Valentinois was there alone. She received them affably, but with somewhat of regal state, and begged the Marchioness to seat herself, acting in all things as if the palace were her own.

"Is that note for me, Monsieur de Masseran?" she inquired, after having announced that the King would join them in a few minutes, and asked some questions of common courtesy regarding the health of the Marchioness of Masseran. "Is that note which you hold in your hand, for me?"

"It is, madam," replied the other. "It is from Monsieur de Brienne, whom we left booted and spurred, with his horses at the door, ready to mount at a moment's notice."

The Duchess took the note, and read. "Madam," it ran, "I am ready promptly to set out for the frontier of Savoy, as soon as my errand is clearly ascertained. My dear sister Isabel is either the wife of my earliest friend, Bernard de Rohan, to whom she was promised by my father, and to whom it is my first wish she should be united, or the marriage which I understand has taken place is null. If she be his wife, Heaven forbid that I should make even an attempt to separate them, which I am sure De Rohan would instantly and justly resist. If, however, the King, by an edict which I must not dare to impugn, has thought fit, as I am told, to declare such marriages void, whether past or future, it, of course, becomes my duty immediately to seek my sister, and to keep her with me till such time as we obtain his majesty's permission for her final union to my friend. But I must first be positively certified that such an edict has been signed. If I can show this to De Rohan, I know him too well to doubt his conduct; but, if I cannot show it to him, I must not and dare not attempt measures towards him which he would infallibly resist. At the same time, madam, let me tell you, with all respect, that I find I have myself been trifled with;

that false information regarding De Rohan's movements has been given me in order to prevent my joining him at Grenoble, as he wished; and that I am certain my sister Isabel has been driven to give her hand thus suddenly to her promised husband by circumstances of which we are not aware."

"More good sense than I gave him credit for," said the Duchess, musing.

"May I be permitted, madam, to see the note which has excited your admiration?" inquired the Lord of Masseran, with a quiet sneer.

"Nay, Monsieur de Masseran," answered the Duchess, "it was not written for the public benefit."

"And, doubtless," continued the Lord of Masseran, "as the young gentleman was not in the sweetest of moods, it was not written for my private benefit either?"

"He never mentions your name, my lord," replied the Duchess, "nor speaks of you in any way.—But here comes my good lord the Chancellor: the King will not be long."

Her prediction was verified, for Bertrandi had scarcely entered the room when Henry himself appeared, accompanied by his son, afterwards Francis the Second, and followed by a page, who placed himself at the door to prevent any one from entering without permission. Every one present drew back as the King appeared, and bowed low; while, with a frowning brow, he crossed the cabinet, and seated himself at a small table. The Dauphin then took a place upon his father's right hand, and the Chancellor, after a deprecatory bow to the Duchess of Valentinois, advanced to the King's left.

"I grieve, madam," said Henry, addressing the Marchioness de Masseran in a courteous tone—"I grieve to see you apparently so much altered in health. It would seem that the air of Savoy—that pure fine air—suits not your constitution. We must keep you more with us in Paris."

"I have been suffering some anxiety and grief, sire," replied the lady, while the eyes of the Lord of Masseran were bent keenly and fiercely upon her.

"Most sorry am I to hear it," replied the King. "We believed that, in providing for you so noble and high a husband as the Lord of Masseran, we should have removed grief and anxiety from you altogether. We trust that we have not been deceived in this noble lord?" continued the King, gazing sternly upon the Savoyard.

"Your majesty has, I believe, been mistaken in what this dear and excellent lady said," replied the Lord of Masseran,

—" I discovered no charge against myself in her words. Was there any, dear lady?"

" Oh no," replied the lady, quickly, and it seemed fearfully —" none, none—I spoke alone of the grief and anxiety which, as you know, I came hither to lay before his majesty, if we were fortunate enough to find audience."

" Then I will beg you, madam," said the King, " to lay it before me at once, and fully, confiding in me entirely as you would in a brother, and remembering that, whoever be the offender, you have in the King one who can protect as well as punish, and who will protect wherever he sees wrong offered, or evil suffered."

The lady gave a momentary glance at her husband, as if of timid inquiry. It was like a child saying its lesson and looking up for a word of direction or encouragement. " I thank your majesty much," she said, " for your gracious promise, and I come to you with full confidence, feeling sure that you will grant me redress for what I consider a great injury. My complaint is this, that a gentleman of high rank and station, connected with some of the highest families of this realm, a distinguished soldier also, and one who has hitherto borne a high character, has—while pretending to be carrying on the war in Piedmont, and commanding certain bodies of your majesty's troops—has, I say, clandestinely carried away my daughter Isabel de Brienne during the temporary absence of my husband, Monsieur de Masseran. He had even induced a priest to perform the marriage ceremony between him and her, when the fortunate return of my husband at the very moment, enabled him to seize them at the altar. I say, sire, that this is my complaint, and for this I beg redress; the more so, indeed, inasmuch as this very gentleman who has so acted was well aware that your majesty had expressed yourself strongly against such clandestine marriages, and had even proposed an edict declaring them void and of no effect."

" Pray who is this gentleman?" demanded the King, in a stern tone. " By your showing, madam, he has acted bitterly wrong, and, unless some extenuations appear, he shall be most severely punished; nor shall that punishment be the less on account of his rank, distinction, and services, as he could neither plead ignorance, inexperience, nor folly."

The features of the Lord of Masseran relaxed into a dark smile; and the lady replied, " His name, sire, was once dear and familiar to me and mine—it is Bernard, Baron de Rohan."

"What! our good friend and daring captain?" exclaimed the King—"this is, indeed, too bad! Monsieur de Rohan ought to have known that he had nothing to do but to apply to ourself, not only to obtain at once our royal permission, but also to induce us to use every argument with such of the lady's family as might be opposed to his wishes."

"Sire," replied the lady, taking advantage of a pause in the King's answer, "this gentleman has acted ill in all respects. He neither put confidence in your majesty nor in me: he never even applied for my consent: he has never seen me since he crossed the Alps."

"This is altogether amiss," replied the King. "You say they are separated," he continued, in a musing tone: "where is the young lady? I would fain see and speak with her."

Such communication would not have suited the purposes of the Lord of Masseran, even had it been possible to produce Isabel of Brienne; and, now, having seen his wife make her formal complaint exactly as he could have wished, he took the rest of the business out of her hands, fearful lest she might make some rash admissions. "Alas! sire," he said, "it is impossible that your majesty's commands can be complied with; not only is the lady not with us in Paris, but she has escaped from the hands of those into whose charge I gave her. Where she is, and what doing, we know not; and it is under these circumstances that we come to your majesty, not so much for redress as for aid."

"This complicates the matter, indeed," said Henry: "have you then reason to suppose that she has rejoined him?"

"No, sire," replied the Lord of Masseran, "not so at all; for I ventured to take a step which—although, of course, on my own territories I am free and independent, as lord and sovereign—I would not have done, had I not been aware that your majesty is as just as you are powerful. I found one of your majesty's subjects upon my territories committing an unlawful act, for which I would have punished any of my own vassals with death, and I ventured ——"

"You did not kill him?" exclaimed the King, starting.

"Oh no, sire, no," replied the Savoyard — "I never dreamed of such a thing. I ventured to arrest and imprison him, in order to prevent the evil being carried farther; and, having done so, I instantly set out to cast myself at your majesty's feet, to inform you exactly how I had acted, to beg your forgiveness for having ventured to imprison one of your subjects, and to place the decision of his fate entirely in the hands of your majesty."

"You have acted well and wisely," replied the King, "and,

such being the case, you shall not only have aid but redress. The edict which renders such clandestine marriages null and void shall be signed this instant, and shall be registered by our parliament to-morrow.—My lord the Cardinal, we trust that you come as well prepared this afternoon as you were this morning. Have you the edict with you now?"

"I have not, your majesty," replied Bertrandi; "but it is in your majesty's cabinet."

"Let it be brought instantly," said the King. "This new example of the fault which it is destined to amend, not only fully justifies the act, but also peremptorily requires that clause which remedies the evil just committed. Nor shall this be the only punishment which shall fall upon the head of him who has so far neglected what was due to himself and to us. He must be summoned to Paris immediately; and, in the meantime, means must be taken to bring this refractory girl also to our court.—Be quick, good Cardinal; for we must not be long absent from the hall."

The Dauphin listened to his father in silence, and with an air of deep reverence. "I trust, sire," he said, at length, as soon as he perceived that the King, having given his orders, was turning once more to address the Marquis of Masseran—"I trust that there are some circumstances in the case of Monsieur de Rohan which may mitigate your majesty's anger when known. It seems to me that Monsieur de Masseran has not been completely explicit on one or two subjects: may I presume to ask him a few questions in your majesty's presence?"

"Certainly, Francis," replied the King. "It gives me always pleasure to see you exercise your judgment and powers of mind on subjects of importance."

The young Prince bowed with an ingenuous blush, while the Marquis of Masseran turned a shade paler than usual, and bent down his eyes upon the ground before the boy of sixteen, who now advanced a step to question him. "You tell us, Monsieur le Marquis," he said, "that the Baron de Rohan did not even apply for the consent of your fair lady: may I ask if he ever presented himself at your palace, or château, or whatever it may be, for the purpose of so doing?"

"It was the Marchioness who said so—not I," replied the Lord of Masseran: "I was absent at the time."

"At what time?" demanded the Prince, sharply; and, seeing the Savoyard hesitate, he added, "Did or did not Monsieur de Rohan come to your gates? and was he, or was he not, refused admission?"

"I believe he did," said the Marquis of Masseran—"I

believe he did present himself at the gates when I was absent."

"He himself believed that you were not absent," replied the youth, with royal sternness, while the King felt no little surprise to find that his son had so intimate a knowledge of the facts in question, and the Marquis of Masseran, still more surprised, concealed his astonishment less skilfully than the monarch. "On my word, your highness," he said —"on my life, I was absent."

"But yet, Monsieur de Masseran," continued the Prince, "you were perfectly well aware that Monsieur de Rohan presented himself at your gates, demanding to speak with yourself, in the first place, and then, in your absence, with this fair lady your wife, who certainly was within the château; and yet you suffered her—unconsciously upon her part, no doubt—to lead his majesty to believe that her approbation had not been sought and was utterly contemned. This was not right, sir; for it was misleading the King."

"You speak well and wisely, Francis," said his father: "go on, my dear boy, go on, if you have anything more to ask."

"One or two things more, may it please your majesty," he replied, with a look of pride in his father's approbation, but keeping his eyes still fixed upon the Lord of Masseran. "My next question is, as the young lady has a brother who is her next male relation, did he or did he not give his consent to the marriage of Monsieur de Rohan with his sister?"

"In regard to that, sir, I can say nothing," replied the Lord of Masseran. "Monsieur de Brienne, your highness, is not under my charge and guidance. All I have to say is, his mother most positively refused her consent."

"It might be more straightforward, sir," replied the Prince, "to say whether, to your knowledge, Monsieur de Brienne consented or not."

"I think, monseigneur," said Diana of Poitiers, taking a step forward—"I think I may reply fully to your question, which Monsieur de Masseran seems not inclined to do. Henry de Brienne always has approved of his sister's marriage to Bernard de Rohan, and Monsieur and Madame de Masseran are amply aware of the fact."

"I do not deny it," said Madame de Masseran, sharply. "He is a headstrong and unruly boy."

"One question more," said the Prince, "and I have done. Is not Bernard de Rohan justified, to a certain degree, in that which he has done, by a written promise of Mademoiselle de Brienne's hand, given to him by her own father shortly

before the good Count's death? I ask you, madam, is this not the case?"

"It is the case that he has such a promise," replied Madame de Masseran, in the same shrewish tone, "but not that he is justified by it, your highness. That promise never had either my consent or approbation; though the late Monsieur de Brienne, who was his guardian and brought him up, was foolishly fond of this boy, and thought that he was everything great and noble, I had always different views for my daughter, and never either directly or indirectly countenanced that promise."

"I am in no way interested in this business, sire," said the Dauphin, turning towards his father, "not being personally acquainted in the slightest degree with Monsieur de Rohan; but I thought it necessary to ask these few questions in your majesty's presence, in consequence of information I had received in a somewhat circuitous manner. Having thus far elicited the truth, which was at first evidently concealed from you, your majesty's wisdom must decide the rest ——"

"This is the edict, sire," said the Cardinal Bertrandi, reentering the chamber: "it wants but your royal signature and the great seal. May I offer you the pen?" And, thus saying, he spread the parchment on the table before the King.

Henry took the pen, paused for a moment, and then turned his eyes upon the Duchess of Valentinois. She looked down upon the ground, however, and uttered not a word. The King dipped the pen in the ink, and wrote his name at the bottom of the edict. The Chancellor countersigned it, and raised it from the table.

"Now, Diana," said Henry, in a low voice, turning to the Duchess, "what think you?"

"That your majesty has done perfectly right," replied the lady, in the same low tone. "Not that this poor Bernard de Rohan, it would appear, is really to blame."

"I do not know," replied the King—"I do not know; but we shall soon see. The question must be inquired into," he added, in a louder voice. "I will hear all parties, and then decide. For the present, the marriage is annulled. Monsieur de Masseran, hasten back to Savoy, and instantly set the Baron de Rohan at liberty. Let some one proceed immediately—her brother will be the best, the fittest, the only fit person—let him immediately proceed to seek for Mademoiselle de Brienne, and bring her to Paris without loss of time. You, Monsieur de Masseran, will command De Rohan, in our name, to present himself in the capital within fourteen

days from the date of his liberation by your hand. You will do well also to come hither yourself as speedily as may be; for our good friend Brissac, who is somewhat of a sanguinary person to deal with, has conceived an objection to the frequent passing of couriers through your part of the country. It were well to keep out of Brissac's way.—My good lord Cardinal, see that all things requisite be done, and also that the edict be duly registered in the parliament to-morrow. Come, Francis, come. We shall have all the world marvelling at our absence."

CHAPTER XVII.

What would life be without its varieties?

I forget where I have met with it—whether in the works of Kant and his disciples, or in the thoughts and imaginations attributed to Zoroaster, or in some of the lucubrations of Plato, or in the fragments of Epicurus, whose doubtful philosophy has left the world at war as to his tendency towards good or evil, virtue or vice: certainly it was not in Pyrrho, who had nothing good in him, or in Confucius, the great teacher of the tea-growing nation—I forget where I have met with it; but amongst the many speculations, wise and foolish, learned and ignorant, fanciful and earthly, with which we children of the lower sphere from time to time have amused ourselves, sometimes reverently, sometimes impiously, sometimes with humility, sometimes audaciously, there is to be found a theory—perhaps it merely deserves the name of an hypothesis — which attributes to the Deity, almost as an attribute, but, at all events, as a necessity, the endless variety of creations, and a satisfaction, if we may use the term, in viewing the infinite multiplicity of his own works.

Without presuming, however, to raise our eyes to scan things that are hidden from us, or to reason upon any attributes of God, except such has he as deigned to reveal to us—without daring to lay down limits to infinity, or, like the stupid idolaters of ancient times, the Greek and Roman inventors of the most barbarous worship that ever perhaps was devised, who after making to themselves gods, and clothing those gods with all the most infamous of human passions, ended by enchaining their very deities themselves, under the law of a necessity which bound all things, and left godhead as impotent as humanity—without such audacity or such

foolishness, we may well look round upon the universe exposed to our eyes, and, seeing that God has been pleased to render his creations infinite, we may at least feel certain that the varieties which he has displayed are in themselves excellent and beautiful, each deriving propriety from the other, and all forming a grand scheme in which the diversity of the parts is only one admirable feature. Our own eyes and our own senses, our own hearts and our own feelings, convince us of it every moment; and from the glorious mountain to the minute blade of grass which grows by its side, from the boundless ocean to the small bright glistening drop that it dashes in spray upon the rocks that bound it, every variety contributes visibly to our delight and to the beauty of the wonderful scene in which we dwell.

Variety, then, forms a part of enjoyment; but let it not be supposed that the admission of this fact—derived, as we derive it, from the works of God himself—can ever have a tendency to produce evil, to generate the licentious desire of multiplying and changing pleasures, or to create the fickle and fluttering inconstancy which ranges dissatisfied from object to object. In the works of God, though the varieties be infinite, and the contrasts sometimes immense, there is still a general and beautiful harmony, a fine and exact adaptation of every part to the other. Each change and each variation has its end and object, each step has its purpose, and each contrast ends in some grand result.

By the same rules, however, must the search for variety be guided, as the condition of producing happiness. Means of varying our pleasures, almost to infinity, have been given to us by the Almighty, within the limits which he has himself assigned to us. The enjoyment of his own works, the contemplation of his goodness, the love of his will, the devotion to his service, were alone sufficient, were man rightly wise, to afford more varied exercise to the human mind than would fill many a long life, even if the Almighty had not loaded our pathway with opportunities of a thousand other gratifications, innocent in themselves, and endless in their combinations. In fact, the variety which we seek in our way through life must be framed, not partially, but entirely, upon the model of that which we see in creation. Each new endeavour, each alteration of pursuit, must have its high object, and in itself be good; and, as we and our existence are but parts of a great system, so must each change be part of the great system of our life.

In an humbler and in a lesser way, he who sits down to tell a tale—intended not alone to while away an idle hour

for himself or for others, but also to do some good while it amuses—may well indulge in following every work of nature, and every page in the book of human life, and change the scene continually, varying the characters, the personages, the events which he depicts; but he must also bear in mind that each is part of one general scheme, each tends to one particular and distinct object.

From the court of France and the gay scenes of the capital we must once more travel back to the rugged mountain passes amongst which our tale began, and to those in whose fate, to say sooth, we are the most interested. Although we are ourselves somewhat anxious to discover what has become of the fair Isabel of Brienne—how her escape has been effected—where she is now wandering—how she is guided, guarded, and protected—we must, nevertheless—though we suspect that her path was dangerous, thorny, and sorrowful—return to Bernard de Rohan, and leave him no longer upon the side of the mountain.

The young cavalier rode on, accompanied by Corse de Leon, with as much speed as the rough and tortuous nature of the road would admit. The men who had brought the horses followed quickly after; and, in about twenty minutes, they reached that spot in the valley where the two roads divided, which we have already mentioned more than once. Here Corse de Leon was about to proceed at the same pace up the shorter road, leaving upon the left hand that by which, upon a former night, he had brought back Isabel de Brienne to the castle of Masseran. One of his followers, however, instantly shouted to him: "Ho! signior, ho! you cannot go by that road except on foot. It was that which kept us so long. The stream is swelled, and the bridge is gone again, and we were obliged to come round the other way."

"The stream swelled!" said Corse de Leon, in a thoughtful tone. "There must be something going on farther up in the mountains. The snows must be melting, or some glacier breaking up! However, let us go on by this other road. One of you remain here, and see if we are followed," he continued, turning to the men behind him; "let the other go down to the cross, and tell Pinchesne and the rest to come over the hill. Let them leave one or two in the valley, in case they should be wanted. Now, let us on!" and he rode forward more slowly than before, though the left-hand road which he pursued was the longer of the two. He seemed, however, in one of those moody fits during which bitter memories continually mingled with a natural current of powerful abstract thoughts, changing their character from the calm

reasonings of a man of acute and high-toned mind and intelligence, to morose and misanthropical ponderings, wherein all the images were gloomy and harsh. At such times his whole conduct and demeanour varied according to the mood of the moment: even his corporal gestures, the quickness or slowness of his pace, as well as his look and his tone of voice, were all affected by what was passing in his mind. When on his guard, indeed, no one was more deliberate, thoughtful, and measured, in every look, word, and gesture; but that was a matter of habit and acquired self-command. By nature, he was one of those whose whole corporal frame is, as it were unconsciously, the quick and ready slave of the spirit.

A change had come over him since they had mounted their horses, and such was in reality the secret of his riding more slowly. He might be actuated, indeed, in some degree, by consideration for the animal on which he was mounted; for the way, as we have before said, was nearly two leagues longer, and the night was excessively hot and oppressive, so that the white foam was already about the horse's neck and bridle. The sky was clear of all clouds, however, and the stars were shining bright, though they seemed smaller and farther off than usual. As they turned, the distant pointed summit of an icy mountain was seen towering over one of the passes, white and glittering in the starlight, while, around it, without any visible clouds, there played occasionally bright coruscations as of faint summer lightning. For some way Corse de Leon did not speak; but, at length, he said, putting his hand to his brow, "Were there any clouds in the sky, I should think there would be a storm to-night. It seldom happens that the elements, as is the case with human life, give us storms without clouds. We have generally some warning of the tempest."

"There is a moaning sound in the hills," said Bernard de Rohan, "and yet I feel no wind. But do you not think," he continued, reverting to what his companion had said—"do you not think that it generally happens in human life we have some forewarning of the storms that befall us?"

"Not from external things," replied Corse de Leon—"not from external things. Often, often without the slightest cause to fear a change, suddenly a thousand adverse circumstances combine to overwhelm us. It is true, indeed—it is true, that there may be other indications of a different kind."

"Ay," answered Bernard de Rohan, "that is what I mean. Do you not think that when we have no external omens of what is coming—when no cloud blackens the sky, when no

red sun announces the tempest of the following day—do you not think that even then, within us, there may be a warning voice which tells us of the storm that we see not, and bids us seek some shelter from its fury?"

"Like that low murmuring that we hear even now," said Corse de Leon.

"I remember," continued Bernard de Rohan, without marking his words particularly, "that, not many days ago, as I was crossing the mountains to come hither, a fit of gloom fell upon me: I knew not why; for all was bright and cheerful in the prospect before me. I could not shake it off for some time; and in vain I tried to scoff at my own feelings. They would have way: I felt as if some misfortunes were about to befall me; and, though not one of all the things which have since occurred could by any chance have been divined at the time, yet you see that misfortunes did assail me even within a few days."

"Do you call these misfortunes?" demanded Corse de Leon. "You are younger in heart than I even thought you were. But what you say is worthy of memory; if what you felt were really a presentiment of coming evils, take my word for it they are scarcely yet begun:—you will want watching and assistance," he added, thoughtfully; "you will need aid and help with a strong hand—I have not forgotten my promise, and I will keep it. But quick, let us ride on! Our horses feel that there is something coming, and I would fain reach Gandelot's inn before it comes."

"I should suppose," replied Bernard de Rohan, "that it offers very inefficient shelter. It is built so completely at the foot of the mountain, that I wonder the snows in winter do not overwhelm it."

"It has twice been crushed under an avalanche," replied his companion, "and they still build it up again on the same spot; but what the house has to fear is as much the water as the snow; and it is because it is no good place of shelter that I would fain be there."

Bernard de Rohan understood him in a moment; and the thought of Isabel de Brienne was quite sufficient to make him spur on eagerly. About half a league farther, the road turned a projection of the mountain; and, shortly after they had passed the angle of the rock, the spray of a cataract dashed in their faces, while an immense volume of water rushed furiously down from a spot some hundred yards above them, looking in that dim hour like some vast giant robed in white and leaning against the mountain. The torrent itself gushed across the road, and Bernard de Rohan turned his

eyes upon his companion, not recollecting such an obstruction in their way.

"Some four or five hours ago," said Corse de Leon, "when I passed by that spot, there was scarcely water enough to quench the thirst of a wolf, and now it is a torrent. There is some great commotion above there.—But perhaps it is all past, and these may be the results. We must try and force our horses through, however: keep as close to the face of the rock as possible."

So saying, he spurred on; but it was with the greatest difficulty that either he or his companion compelled their horses to make the attempt to pass the torrent. The pattering of the spray, and the roaring of the stream, terrified and bewildered them; and when, at length, urged forward, partly by chiding, partly by gentleness, they did dash on, the animals bore their riders through the midst of the current where the ground was rough and insecure. Twice the charger which bore Bernard de Rohan stumbled, and nearly fell; and twice, though drenched with the pouring of the water on his head, and gasping for breath under the rushing weight upon him, he aided the horse up with heel and hand till he reached the other side, and stood on firm ground.

Well nigh stunned and bewildered, he turned to look for Corse de Leon. The Brigand was standing beside him, dismounted from the horse, and holding the animal by the rein with one hand, while he raised the other towards the sky with a look of eager, yet solemn attention. The next instant he grasped the young cavalier's hand, exclaiming—"Stir not a step! it is coming, it is coming!—Now, as ever, we stand in God's good will to live or die; but death is very near us."

At the same moment, there came a roar as of distant cannon: many shot off at once; then a murmuring pause; then a roar again; and, as it came on, the deafening sound of the thunder itself would have been as nothing to the terrific rushing noise that echoed through the hollow valleys. It seemed as if a thousand sounds were mingled; for the howling of the wind still continued, as if imitating the screams and wailing of people in pain; while the crash of rocks falling upon rocks, and of the stout trees of the forest rent into shivers, and of rolling masses of earth and snow, crags and cliffs, with one half the mountain itself, was alone overpowering by the very sound that beat upon the ear, even had it not been accompanied by an awful pressure of the air which took away the breath, and a sense of coming annihilation which seemed to check the beating of the heart even before death had stilled it with his icy hand.

There was time for but one short prayer to Him on high, and one thought of her he loved, before the crumbling ruin came down into the valley, sweeping close past the very place where Bernard de Rohan stood. Rocks and stones rushed on before it, and one immense mass struck his horse on the knees and chest, threw him backwards on his haunches, and beast and rider rolled over the edge into the stream. For an instant he lost his consciousness; and then, waking to life, found himself in the valley below, dashed by the torrent against the rocky banks.

He had been thrown free, however, from the horse, and, though to swim was impossible, from the crags, the trees, the projecting stones, and the fierce struggling of the torrent, yet he contrived to grasp a rugged branch that hung over the water, swung himself to the bank, and sprang upon the land. It was all impulse; for he hardly knew how he found the bough or reached the firm ground. Even when there, he was fain to cast himself down, and press his hands upon his forehead, for everything swam round with him: the earth seemed to shake beneath his feet; and the roar of falling rocks and crags still mingled with the loud voice of the turbulent waters from which he had just escaped. The mightier sound, however, had passed away, that awful rushing noise, unlike anything else on earth; and gradually the others ceased also, till at length nothing was heard but the flowing of the river, as it foamed and struggled with the obstacles in its course.

When Bernard de Rohan could rise and look round him, everything was dark, except where in the sky appeared the twinkling myriads of the night, beginning, he fancied, to look pale at the approach of morning. He listened in the hopes of hearing some voice; but, if there was any, it was drowned in the noise of the waters.

With a thousand painful apprehensions in his heart—with no way of relieving his anxiety, with nothing left but to wait for the return of daylight—he cast himself down again, after having called once or twice aloud upon Corse de Leon, without receiving any answer. He could not distinguish whither he had been borne. He could see some large trees still standing near him, and some enormous black masses of rock lifting their heads around. The shadow of the giant mountain rose up, too, before him; but its form seemed changed, and he gazed as if to ascertain in what features it was altered.

Gradually the summit of the hill, warmed into a dusky brown, caught some of the rays of the rising sun, and—while

every moment it assumed a brighter hue, till it crowned itself, and decorated the mists which surrounded it, with gold—a sober twilight crept into the valley; and Bernard de Rohan found himself standing in the grey morning with a world of ruin and desolation around him, without a trace of road or human habitation, and with the narrow pass along which his way had been bent, completely blocked up by the huge masses of the fallen mountain.

CHAPTER XVIII.

With that strange dizzy sensation which we feel when awaking from the first stunning effects of any great catastrophe, Bernard de Rohan continued to gaze around him for some minutes, as the morning rose brighter and brighter upon the wild scene of destruction in the midst of which he stood. He was himself much bruised and injured: blood was upon various parts of his garments; his strong muscular arm would scarcely support him as he leaned against the rock, and his brain still reeled giddily from time to time with the fall and the blows he had received: but his own corporal pain engaged less of his attention than the terrible picture which the rising light displayed. Everywhere appeared vestiges of the desolating phenomenon of the preceding night. The order of all things around him, and especially to the north-east, seemed to have been entirely broken up and changed. The granite rocks, from the higher summits of the mountain, were now piled up in immense masses below, mingled with vast tracts of the most dissimilar substances, slate and sand-stone and common vegetable earth, with here and there a thick layer of snow protruding through the chasms, marked in long streaks by the various kinds of earth over which it had passed. Shivered fir-trees, and immense fragments of oak, with their green foliage still waving in the air, stuck out here and there in scattered disarray from the tumbled chaos of rock, and sand, and earth; and the fragments of a cottage roof which lay reversed high up the side of the mountainous pile that now blocked up the valley, showed that the sweeping destruction had, at all events, reached one of the homes of earth's children.

Such was the scene towards the north-east; but it was evident that the fallen masses had not yet firmly fixed themselves in the position which they were probably to bear for

ages afterwards. From time to time a rock rolled over, but slowly, sometimes making its way down into the valley with increasing speed, sometimes pausing and fixing itself in a new bed, part of the way down. None of these, however, in their descent, reached the spot where Bernard de Rohan stood, for he was at least three hundred yards from the base of the mountain which had thus been produced during the night. As it came down, indeed, the immense body had been accompanied by the fall of large masses of stone, which were scattered on all sides, so that the green bosom of the valley—which, on the preceding day, had been carpeted by soft and equal turf, only broken here and there by a tall tree or clumps of shrubs and bushes, or else by large fantastic lumps of rock or stone, fallen immemorial ages before, and clothed by the hand of time with lichens or creeping plants —was now thickly spotted with fresh fragments, which from space to space had shivered the trees in their descent, and in other places was soiled with long tracks of various coloured earths, which had showered down like torrents as the great mass descended farther on.

The stream, swollen, turbid, and furious, was rushing on amidst the rocks in the middle of the valley; but the traces of where it had lately been, evidently showed that it was rapidly decreasing in volume, and had already much diminished. Bernard de Rohan traced it up with his eye to the spot where it descended from the hill, crossing the road, which ran along the top of a steep bank on the opposite side. The cataract through which he had forced his horse the night before was there visible, and still showed a large column of rushing water, though it, too, was greatly lessened. This waterfall, however, gave the young cavalier some mark by which to judge of the distances; and he found that he must have been carried down the stream nearly three hundred yards before he recovered himself and got to land. He thus perceived how near the chief mass of falling mountain must have passed to the spot where he had been standing, and he felt that the detached rock, which had struck his horse, and cast him down into the stream before the whole fell, had probably saved his life.

But what had become of his companion? he asked himself. What had become of that being who, strange, and wild, and erring, as he doubtless was, had contrived not only to fix himself strongly upon his affections, but to excite, in a considerable degree, his admiration and esteem? Had he perished in that awful scene? had he closed his wild and turbulent existence in the tremendous convulsion which had

taken place? He feared it might be so; and yet, when he looked up and saw distinctly, that—though ploughed up by the heavy stones that had fallen, and thus in many places rendered impassable—the road was still to be traced by the eye for some thirty yards beyond the cascade, he did hope—though the hope was but faint—that Corse de Leon might have escaped.

If so, traces of him and of the way that he had taken might yet be found. But another possibility soon presented itself to the mind of Bernard de Rohan. The Brigand might have been thrown over the precipice by some of the falling rocks, like the young cavalier himself, and might even then be lying mutilated and in agony not far off. Without a moment's delay, Bernard proceeded to search along the course of the stream, which was far too much swollen to permit of his passing it.

Nothing of Corse de Leon could he see, however: not a vestige, not a track; but a few yards from the spot where the cascade, after striking the road, bounded down again into the valley below, he found in the bed of the stream, crushed and mangled in an awful manner, the carcass of the poor horse which he had himself so lately ridden. The size of the animal had caused it to be entangled sooner amongst the rocks in the bed of the stream than he had been, but it had evidently been killed by the blow of the first fragment of stone which struck it, for its two front legs were broken, and its chest actually dashed in.

It was a painful and a sickening spectacle in the midst of a scene so wild, so awful, and extraordinary; but one additional horror, which might well have been there, was wanting. The vultures, which are said to be scared from their pursuit of prey by no portent, had nevertheless not approached as yet; and Bernard de Rohan, with his arms crossed upon his chest, remained for a moment looking at the dead body of the animal, as it lay half out of the water and half hidden by the rushing stream, with many a dark and gloomy association crossing his mind, though vaguely and unencouraged.

As he stood and gazed, a small bird, upon an opposite tree, which had escaped uninjured throughout the late catastrophe, burst out in a wild, and somewhat melancholy, song; and Bernard de Rohan, with his heart heavier than before, turned and retrod his steps, in the hopes of finding some place where he could cross the torrent farther down in the valley. In this expectation he was disappointed; the stream only grew larger, and deeper, and more impetuous, swelled by the different rivulets that were pouring down the sides of the

mountains; and at length, after wandering on more than three miles, it plunged through a deep chasm in the rock, which left no footing for the young cavalier to make his way farther, on that side of the valley. Could he have passed the waters, it would have been easy to have made his way up to the little mountain road by which he had passed the preceding night, and which was now before his eyes. But he was shut in between the torrent on one side and the high mountain on the other; and although he saw some sheep-paths and other tracks, he knew not where they led to, but had only the certainty that they must take him to a distance from the spot which he wished to reach immediately, in order to relieve the darkest anxiety of all the many that were at his heart. Turning back, then, he made a desperate, but ineffectual effort, to pass the masses of the mountains which had been thrown down, and by mid-day he was forced to retread his steps nearly to the same spot where he had found himself in the morning.

In much pain from the bruises he had received, and exhausted with exertion and want of food, he sat down for a time to rest, and drank of the waters of the stream, although they were still troubled. He then took the resolution of endeavouring to climb the mountains which formed that side of the valley where he then was, trusting that he might find some one to show him the nearest way to the inn on the eastern slope of the hills. The path was rugged and winding, the mountain bleak and arid, and several hours elapsed while he wandered on, before he heard the sound of any living creature, or saw any moving thing, except when once or twice some object of the chase started away from his path, and when the golden lizards, basking in the sun, turned round their snake-like heads to gaze on the unwonted human form that passed them.

At length, however, towards five o'clock in the evening, completely tired out, without having tasted food, and with no drink whatsoever but that one draught from the stream, he heard—as may be well supposed, with joy—the barking of a dog; and, looking up, he saw upon a point of the crag above, a noble animal of the alpine breed, baying fiercely at the step of a stranger.

Bernard de Rohan went on; and, following the dog as it retreated before him, he soon heard the bleating of some sheep, and, in a minute or two after, beheld a small white wreath of smoke rising in the clear mountain air, with the roof of a little cottage in a sheltered nook of the hill. It was

as poor a habitation as can be conceived; but the sight was a glad one to the young cavalier, and he approached the little low-walled yard, which served as a sort of fold, with feelings of infinite joy.

The barking of the dog brought forth the shepherd, holding a large pot of boiling ewe milk in his hand. He was a small plain-featured man, not very intelligent, who, notwithstanding his solitary life, had not acquired that desire of knowing more of his fellow-creatures, which is so constantly the result of voluntary seclusion in monasteries. He was, however, hospitable and kind-hearted, and received the young stranger with a gladdening welcome. He set before him, in the very first place, the best of all he had, and asked, with some eagerness, of news from the valley; for he was already aware of what had occurred during the preceding night, and indeed knew far more than Bernard de Rohan himself.

The young cavalier told him all that he had to tell, and then questioned him rapidly and anxiously in turn. His first question, as may be easily supposed, referred to Gandelot's inn, and oh! how much more freely did he seem to breathe when the old man replied, "Oh, that is quite safe! The fall did not come within half a league of it."

"Are you sure?—quite sure?" demanded Bernard de Rohan.

"My son was down there to-day with cheeses," answered the man, "and saw them all. He will be home with the rest of the sheep presently, and will tell yon more about it."

"Was there a young lady there?" Bernard de Rohan inquired, with as much calmness as he could command.

"Yes, he talked of a stranger lady from France," replied the shepherd, "with a number of soldiers and attendants belonging to some French lord, for whom they were all grieving and weeping bitterly, because he had been killed somehow."

"How long will it be ere your son returns?" asked Bernard de Rohan, eager, notwithstanding all the fatigues that he had suffered, to reach the inn that night.

The answer he received was one of those vague and indefinite replies which are always given on such occasions by persons to whom, as to the shepherd, time seems of little or no value. He said that the lad would be back very soon, but hour after hour passed, and he did not appear.

The young cavalier became impatient, and finding that it was impossible, from any direction the old man could

give, to learn the path which he ought to pursue, he urged him, with many promises of reward, to conduct him to Gandelot's small hostelry himself.

Had he proposed to the good shepherd, however, a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, it would not have seemed more impracticable. He declared that it was perfectly out of the question; that now his wife was dead, there was nobody to remain in his cottage; that the distance was fully four leagues, and that it would take them as many hours to go. "It will be dark in half an hour," he continued, "and we should but break our necks over the rocks and precipices."

Bernard de Rohan found that it was impossible to move him; the son did not come home till the evening was beginning to grow grey, and the young cavalier was obliged, unwillingly, to resign all hopes of rejoining his bride before the next day.

With the shepherd and his son the use of any other light except that of the broad sun was unknown, except in the depth of the winter; and though Bernard de Rohan could have sat up for many an hour questioning the younger man upon all he had seen and heard at the inn, but a short period was allowed him for so doing ere they retired to repose.

The information that he obtained was but little, for neither the elder nor the younger mountaineer was very intelligent, nor very communicative. The latter, indeed, seemed to divine at once what had never struck the old man, that the young cavalier who had become their accidental guest was no other than the person by whose supposed death the lady whom he had seen at the inn had been plunged into such deep grief.

"She will be mighty glad to see you," he said, taking the matter for granted; "and if we set off by day-light tomorrow you will just catch her as she wakes, for you nobles are sad lie-abeds."

"Pray tell me, however, before we sleep," said Bernard de Rohan, "how the lady obtained information of the danger which I have so fortunately escaped. Was it from Corse de Leon?"

The young man started, and gazed earnestly in his face by the dim light which still found its way into the cottage. "Corse de Leon!" he said, "Corse de Leon! that is a name we never mention in these parts of the country. No! no! I know nothing about Corse de Leon, though they do say that he has as many poor men's prayers as rich men's curses."

Bernard de Rohan found that that name had effectually closed the young shepherd's mouth, and not a word more upon the subject could be obtained from him.

He interrupted their habits of early sleep no longer; but made the best of such means of repose as they could give him, and wearied out with long exertion, soon fell asleep, with the happy certainty that she whom he loved was free, and corporally well, while the mental anguish which he knew she must be suffering he had the means of joyfully removing on the succeeding day.

The pain of the bruises which he had received woke the young cavalier, as soon as excessive fatigue had been in some degree relieved. But the nights were at that season short; daylight soon after appeared; the shepherds rose with the first ray of the sun; and without other breakfast than a draught of warm milk, Bernard and his guide set off across the mountains. The time occupied by their journey was fully as much as the old man had said; for mountain leagues are generally long ones, and the road was rough and difficult to tread.

At length the view of a plainer country broke upon the eye; and as they descended a steep hill by a footway upon the open mountain side, Bernard de Rohan saw before him the rich lands towards Chambery, and at the distance of about half a mile, the little inn of Gandelot, seated quietly at the foot of the passes. It looked tranquil and happy in the morning light; but why or wherefore the young gentleman could not tell; a feeling of uneasiness took possession of him at the very quietness which the whole scene displayed. There were none of his people hanging about the door, passing a morning half-hour in listless idleness. There were none at the gates of the stables rubbing down horses or cleaning trappings and arms. There was no busy bustling about of attendants and stable boys. There was nothing, in short, to be seen, but one or two domestic animals at the entrance of the farm-yard, and the servant of the auberge, in a bright coloured petticoat, cleaning some culinary utensils at the door of the inn.

The young cavalier hurried his pace, and getting before the guide, advanced close to the girl before she saw him. She looked up at the approaching step, and then uttered a loud scream, which Bernard de Rohan easily understood to be her comment upon seeing the dead alive again. He passed on at once, however, through the half-open door into the kitchen, but, to his dismay, it presented the complete picture of an inn after guests have departed. Everything had been

put in order, and looked cold and vacant. The neatly swept hearth possessed not more fire than might have lain in the hollow of one's hand, and over it the hostess was cooking a mess for the breakfast of herself and her husband; while the aubergiste stood at a well washed table, counting some pieces of money, which he covered over with his hand at the girl's scream, and looked anxiously towards the door.

The surprise of good Gandelot seemed scarcely less than that of the servant, although it only took the outward form and expression of a deadly paleness. He recovered himself in a moment, however, and then, with a look of honest joy and satisfaction, in spite of all difference of rank and habitual restraint, he seized Bernard de Rohan by the hand, exclaiming, "Jesu Maria! Well, there have been many tears shed to no purpose. Why, bless my soul, how happy the poor lady's heart will be!"

"Where is she?" demanded Bernard de Rohan, eagerly. "Where is she? it seems as if there were nobody here."

"No, indeed," replied Gandelot; "what you say is very true: there is nobody here but your lordship's humble servant and his good wife. Why, what a pity that you came not yesterday at this hour! You would have saved the poor lady many a weary minute."

"Where is she, then? where is she?" demanded Bernard de Rohan, more eagerly than ever. "When did she go? Where is she gone to? Where are my servants, too, and my men-at-arms?"

"Alack, and a well-a-day, sir!" replied the host, "they have all taken wing, and are scattered away like a flock of plovers. Here the lady arrived at the inn with good Father Willand and some ten or twelve of your men, on the day before yesterday, late in the evening; and then there were consultations after consultations as to what was to be done, for every one knew and had heard by that time that you were a prisoner in the castle of Masseran; and the young gentleman who came at the head of your men—not the servants, but the men-at-arms that came after you—vowed that he would attack the castle, and blow open the gates with a petard, and set you free. But when he had talked very high in this way for some time, Father Willand told him to hold his tongue; for, in the first place, the walls of the castle of Masseran were made of stones hard enough to break his teeth, and in the next, as he had got no petard to blow the gates open with but the one in his mouth, it would be of very little service. With that there came not long afterwards a messenger from one whom I must not name, telling the lady

and the priest and all to keep as quiet as might be, for that you would be liberated before daylight on the next morning; and, as his word never fails, they all did keep quiet, but we sat up and watched to see what would come of it. A terrible night you know it was; but we were to have a more terrible morning, for by daylight news came up the valley——"

"That I was killed in the land-slip," said Bernard de Rohan, interrupting him.

"No, no," replied the aubergiste. "Not that at all; but that the tower which was called the prison tower of the castle of Masseran had taken fire and fallen, crushing the dungeon in which you had been placed, and you along with it, in the ruins. The lady went half-distracted, though she would not believe that it was true, till Father Willand himself went up near the castle with a body of your men, to prevent any of the Masseran people from taking him, and then came back and told her it was all too sure. He told her, besides, that the people of the castle vowed it was some one on her part seeking to deliver you who had set fire to the tower, and the good priest advised her to get across the frontier with all speed. But she was so cast down with grief that she seemed to care little more about herself in this world, and lay, my wife said, partly kneeling by her bed-side, partly lying upon it, with her face buried in the clothes, and the sobs coming so thick and hard that it was pitiful to hear. She could not be got to speak or answer a word to any one; and in the midst of all this came in some one whom you know."

"Who, who?" demanded Bernard de Rohan.

The aubergiste whispered in a scarcely audible voice the name of Corse de Leon; and the young cavalier exclaimed, with feelings of as much joy as he could feel at that moment, "Then he is safe, at least—that is some satisfaction."

"Ay, so far safe," replied the man, "that he is not killed as he might have been. But when he came here his left shoulder was out, and would have been useless for ever if he had not made four of us pull it in by main force, and never winked his eyes or uttered a word till it went in with a great start, and then only shut his teeth close."

"But he could have told them," exclaimed Bernard de Rohan—"he could have told that I had escaped before the tower took fire."

"I don't know how it is," replied the landlord; "but, sure enough, he thinks you dead as well as they do. He had a long conversation apart with Father Willand, in that little room—out of the corner there, which you have never seen, and mayhap did not know of, for the door is in the dark, be-

hind the closet and the chimney.—What they talked about, I don't know, but in the end I heard him say, 'Tell her nothing about it till she can bear to hear more. As he is dead, it matters not much how it happened.' Then the priest went to the lady, and with great persuasion got her down from her chamber, and made her take some wine, and, in the end, got her to set off, with some eight or ten of your people accompanying them. That was about twelve o'clock yesterday morning; and in an hour or two after, the rest of your people went away over the mountains to join the good Maréchal de Brissac, by the directions of the person you know."

"This is unfortunate," said Bernard de Rohan, musing, "this is most unfortunate. Do you know which way the lady has taken?"

"She went first to Bonvoisin," replied the host. "But whither she was to turn her steps after that, I know not."

"And I am left here alone," continued the young gentleman, "without horse or arms, at the moment I need them most. Can you furnish me with a horse, good Gandelot?"

"Faith, I have none to give, sir," answered the man, "or I would willingly trust you, if you did not pay me till this time twelvemonth."

"Nay," replied Bernard de Rohan, "I wanted not to be your debtor, Gandelot. Money, thank God, I have with me, but my resource must be Corse de Leon. Where can he be found?"

"Hush, hush!" exclaimed the aubergiste, terrified at the loud tone in which his companion pronounced the name of the Brigand. "Hush, hush! for Heaven's sake. There is somebody talking all this time to the girl outside the door."

"It is but the shepherd who guided me hither," replied the young cavalier. "But answer my question, good Gandelot: where is he to be found?"

"If you will sit here for an hour or two," replied the other, "my wife shall get you something ready to break your fast, and I will go up the side of the hill to see after the person you mention."

"But I wish to proceed immediately," exclaimed Bernard de Rohan. "If I could but get a horse, I would set out at once."

"There is no one who can get you either horse or arms within five leagues," replied the aubergiste, "except the man we were talking of. He can do both, and more too, for he can tell you where the lady is to be found, which I can't. So you have nothing for it but to confer with him. However, it

will be better to send this shepherd back at once to his own place, and for you, either to go into that little room there, to the left, or up the stairs into your room above, for it would be a sad thing to be stopped again; and although we stand on free land here, yet this Lord of Masseran's people are no ways scrupulous into whose face they poke their fist, or into whose soup they dip their spoon."

Though feeling sick at heart with impatience, the young cavalier saw that the plan suggested was the only one he could follow. Having rewarded the shepherd for his trouble in guiding him thither, he allowed the good aubergiste to lead him to his place of concealment; and urging him in the strongest terms to lose no time, he sat himself down to while away the hours as best he might, with all the checkered thoughts of the past and the future.

CHAPTER XIX.

Bernard de Rohan waited long; and though his imagination was not an active one in regard to difficulties or dangers in his own case, yet when he thought of Isabel de Brienne, nurtured with care, and tenderness, and softness, never having known during life the want of protection, or the necessity of acting for herself, never having been an hour without protection—when he thought that she must now go forward to Paris alone, without any one loved or known to soothe and guide her; without any other protection but that of a few menials; with the bitter thought of having lost him she loved for ever, as the chief recollection of the past, and with the expectation of meeting her mother who had been always harsh, and her stepfather, who had treated her with treachery and baseness, as the chief anticipation of the future—his heart burned to speed on, without the loss of a single moment, to protect, to console, and to relieve her from the deep sorrow which he knew too well must overshadow her.

Still one hour passed after another, the sun began to decline from the meridian, and the good hostess only visited him on two occasions. In the first place, to tell him, that a party of travellers who stopped for half an hour at the inn were only peasants from a neighbouring village; and in the next place, to beseech him not to go near the windows, or to show himself in any way, as a party of the Lord of Masseran's men had just passed, and another was speedily to follow.

At length the aubergiste himself appeared, heated and dusty, and closing the door carefully, told him that he had found the man he went to seek, and had brought back with him a few words written on a strip of leather. They were deciphered with difficulty, but were to the following effect:—"I thought you gone for ever. But as you are still destined to remain with the rest of us, so let it be. I will visit you to-night, and you shall soon find the lady; but on no account go on till you have seen me! By so doing, you will endanger her, endanger yourself, and delay your meeting."

Bernard de Rohan gazed upon the writing, and then turned a dissatisfied look towards the sky. "This is trifling," he thought: "I must be across the frontier as speedily as possible. Well might Isabel think me cruel, if I remained here an hour longer, knowing that she is in danger, sorrow, and anxiety."

"Have you heard aught of a horse, my good Gandelot?" he said: "I cannot wait as he requires me. How far is it to the frontier?"

"Two hours' journey on horseback," replied the host, "and four or five afoot. But there is no horse to be found, and you must not think of trying it on foot, my noble lord. You do not know that the people from the castle are scouring the whole road between this and Bonvoisin."

"But they do not know me," answered Bernard de Rohan. "There is scarce one among them that has ever seen me. Five hours! that is long, indeed! But I could buy a horse at Chambery."

"Not before nightfall," replied the host; "and you had a great deal better wait here to see one who can help you more speedily than anybody else."

"Why cannot I go to him?" demanded Bernard de Rohan. "If you could find him, so can I."

"Oh, surely," replied Gandelot; "but you run a great risk of being taken."

"If that be all," answered the young cavalier, "I should think that there was less chance of being taken on the hillside than here. Something must be risked, at all events, Gandelot. Get me a peasant's frock, good friend, and a large hat: my own I lost in the fall, you see. When I am so dressed, I shall pass unknown, I'll warrant, should it be through the midst of this Lord of Masseran's men."

"I must show you the way, however," replied the innkeeper. "But stay a minute, and I'll get what you want. It is no bad plan."

Thus saying, Gandelot left him; but the aubergiste was

not long before he returned, bringing with him a peasant's frock and belt, and a large straw hat, such as we have mentioned in describing the dress of good Father Willand, at the beginning of this true history. The very act of putting them on was a relief to the mind of Bernard de Rohan; for to a man accustomed to action, inactivity adds an almost insupportable burden to grief and anxiety. When the frock, however, was cast over his shoulders, and his head was covered with the hat, Gandelot gazed upon him with a smile, saying, "I must take care, my lord, that I don't mistake you for a peasant, and ask you to sell me eggs. Well, I did not know how much the dress made the man before."

Passing over the bad compliment of his host without notice, Bernard de Rohan only expressed his eagerness to set out; and Gandelot, after having gone down to look round the inn on every side, and to ascertain that no one was watching, returned in a few minutes, carrying in his hand a short sword and dagger, such as were worn commonly by what were called the New Bands, warring in Piedmont for the service of France.

"Nobody can tell what may happen, my lord," he said, "so you had better tuck those up under your gown; but don't draw the belt too tight, or the hilt will appear."

Bernard de Rohan grasped the weapon as he would the hand of an old friend, and concealing it carefully under the frock, he followed the innkeeper, who led him out through the back court of the auberge upon the side of the mountain, where a steep pathway led up between the rocks, and over the lower part of the hill, into one of the valleys, which, without plunging deep into the alpine scenery around, led through a softer but still uncultivated country, in the direction of Albens. The innkeeper strolled on, and the young nobleman followed, both keeping a profound silence, till the inn and all the neighbouring objects were out of sight.

When they had fully plunged into the valley, however, good Gandelot spoke, but still in a low voice, saying, "We are pretty safe here; the danger was up yonder."

Bernard de Rohan made no direct reply, but asked whether the road they were taking did not lead him farther from that which he had afterwards to travel. Assured, however, by the good innkeeper, that it did not, he went on in silence, finding by the length of way that his companion had lost no time upon the previous journey he had made during the morning. At length Gandelot turned a little towards the north, up a smaller valley, which, winding away with many bends and angles, never exposed more than one or two

hundred yards of hill-side to the view at once. At the end of about a quarter of an hour after entering this dell, a solitary house presented itself, as desolate in appearance as well might be. It was old, and built of cold grey stone, with a roof of slates; and a low garden wall which surrounded it enclosed a space of ground amounting to perhaps an acre or an acre and a half, but in no degree impeded the view of the house.

The hills in that spot were quite bare: much lower indeed than the scenery from which Bernard de Rohan had just come, but far more naked and arid. Not a shrub, not a tree, was to be seen. Nothing but scanty turf, broken by scattered stones, with occasional crags here and there, covered the slopes; and had it not been for those thin, short blades of grass, one might have fancied oneself in the world before the vegetable creation had been called into being.

"You will find him there, my good young lord," said Gandelot, pointing forward to the house: "I will stay here. But you had better whistle, as you know how, when you go up, that he may know you are coming. If you find that you are not likely to come back before night—and it is getting somewhat late now—send me out word, and I will hie me home."

"Nay, leave me, leave me, good Gandelot," replied the young cavalier. "I will find my way back: I never forget a path I have once trodden."

Thus saying, he advanced towards the desolate-looking house which stood before him, and at a short distance from it imitated, as well as he could, that peculiar whistle which he had heard more than once amongst the companions of Corse de Leon. The sounds had scarcely issued from his lips, ere the Brigand himself appeared at the door, and, apparently without the slightest apprehension or hesitation, walked forward to meet him. He was habited in the same large cloak and hat which he had worn on the night when Bernard de Rohan first beheld him; but the mantle was not now gathered round him, so that the young nobleman could plainly see he bore his left arm supported by a bandage from his neck.

The moment they met, he grasped Bernard warmly by the hand, saying, "So, you are living! you are living!—I never thought we should see each other again in this world, though I did think we might meet in that where the compensations are reserved to confound the workings of the great bad spirit to whom this earth is given up for evil. But I fell into a sad mistake, and have let your sweet lady go away in the belief that you are dead."

"It is on that account," said Bernard de Rohan, "that I am so eager to set out, in order to put her mind at ease; but I know not where she is to be found, or which road she has taken. Neither have I horse nor arms, nor, I fear, enough in my purse, both to buy them and carry me on my way also."

"And you come to me for all!" said Corse de Leon, with a smile: "who would ever have thought this, some seven or eight years ago, when the young Lord of Rohan struck down to the earth the intendant of the Countess of Brienne, for wronging the sister of a poor soldier far away fighting for his country?—Who would have thought that the poor soldier would ever have been able to aid the young lord in marrying her he loved, or to furnish him with horse, and arms, and money, in an hour of need?—There is a retribution in this world! Ay, there is a retribution even here! But come, my lord, I am your humble servant; but, perhaps, a truer friend than any whom you meet with in your own rank and class. Let us into the house, and rest you for the remainder of the day. You will travel quicker, better, more safely in the night. Ere the sun goes down, you shall have all that you want; and between this and to-morrow's nightfall you may well overtake the lady."

Corse de Leon saw that, notwithstanding the reasons he gave, Bernard de Rohan was not well pleased with even the short delay that he proposed. He was not one who loved long explanations of any kind, but he could feel for an impatient disposition; and he added, as if in reply to his companion's look, "It cannot be otherwise: I have had to send a four hours' journey for the horses, and they cannot be here till night, though the messenger has been absent now near two hours. You would make no greater speed by going back to the inn. Come in, sit down, then, rest you and bear what is unavoidable as patiently as may be; for—though half the difference between great men and little ones in this world lies in their judgment of what can be done and what cannot be done, and though half the things men despair of are as easy as to drink from a stream—yet, nevertheless, there are things that are impossible, and in those cases it is useless to struggle."

Thus saying, he led the young nobleman into the house, the door of which had remained unclosed. Though Bernard de Rohan could hear several voices speaking in one of the rooms as he walked along the passage, it was into a small vacant chamber, on the left-hand side, that Corse de Leon conducted him. The windows commanded a view down a considerable part of the valley, but still the aspect of the

whole place was so undefended and unguarded, that the young cavalier, knowing the state of hostility with the great and powerful in which Corse de Leon lived, could not help feeling some surprise at his choosing such an abode.

"Are you not," he said, gazing from the window, "are you not in a sadly exposed situation here? Why, the Lord of Masseran, or any other of those small tyrants, could attack you at any time without the possibility of your escape."

"You are mistaken," replied Corse de Leon, shortly: "before he came within two leagues of me, I should know his whole proceedings, and either scatter over the hill, and reach coverts, which it were wiser to search for the deer or the chamois, than for Corse de Leon; or else offer the good lord some hospitality on his coming, which he might neither be willing to receive, nor able to return. We have resources that you are not aware of, and neither he nor any one else knows more of them than to make him fear."

"That you yourself have infinite resources in your activity and experience," replied Bernard de Rohan, "I can easily believe; but depend upon it, if you were to trust the guidance of such hazardous matters to other men, they would soon be overthrown."

"Not so, not so," replied his companion; "I know the contrary. Twice, for ends and objects of my own, I have traversed all France, leaving my men behind me; and, though perhaps not quite so busy as when I am here—ay, and somewhat cruel and disorderly when left to their own course—no evil has happened to themselves. I am now about to do the same, and I do it in all confidence."

"Do you propose to go soon?" demanded Bernard de Rohan, in some surprise.

"Ay," replied the Brigand, "soon enough to meet you in Paris some day, perchance, or even to overtake you on the road; and as we now talk about those things, let me caution you never to speak to me unless I speak to you: then take the tone that I take, whether it be one of strangeness or of former acquaintance. Recollect, too, that there is no such person as Corse de Leon beyond the frontiers of Savoy; but that in many a part of France the Chevalier Lenoir is known, and not badly esteemed."

"I will be careful," replied the young lord. "But now, my good friend, tell me whither has my poor Isabel directed her steps?"

"First to Grenoble," replied Corse de Leon, "in the hope of finding her brother there; but should she not meet with

him, she goes thence at once to throw herself at the feet of the King."

"But are you perfectly certain," demanded Bernard de Rohan, "that she has escaped from the pursuit of this base man who has married her mother?"

"Perfectly," replied Corse de Leon: "I saw her across the frontier yesterday myself. Besides, as I told you before, the Lord of Masseran himself is absent, carried by fears, regarding the discovery of his own treachery, into the very jaws of the lion—power. Power is the only true basilisk. Its eyes are those alone in this world which can fascinate the small things hovering round it to drop into its mouth. But the lady is safe. Be satisfied, and you can well overtake her ere she reaches Grenoble. I bade them send back a man to tell me, if she found not her brother there; for as I am going to Paris also, I thought perchance it might be better to keep near her on the road, and bring her help in case she needed it. But your own men are enough, I do not doubt, and I can take but few with me, if any."

"But is it not dangerous," said the young nobleman, "for you to travel immediately after receiving so severe an injury?"

"Dangerous!" said Corse de Leon—"oh there is no danger in such things. I do believe these mountains that I love will crush me at last; for twice have I escaped almost by a miracle. But it is this injury, as you call it, that has determined me to go now. I can be of but little active use here till I can climb a rock again, and use this left arm as well as the right. No man has a title to remain an hour in idleness, whatever be his calling. Sleep itself I do not rightly understand: it is a lapse in the active exertion of our being which is very strange, a sort of calm pool in the midst of a torrent: I suppose it is solely for the body's sake. There could have been no sleep before death came into the world; for, not being subject to decay, the earthly frame could require no refreshment, any more than the spirit. However, as I was saying, idle and inactive drones pretend that they must have rest and pause: if the head aches or the hand is hurt, they declare that they can neither think nor labour; but the wise man and the energetic man makes his spirit like that monstrous serpent which I have heard of, and which, when one head was smitten off, produced at once another. If a man cannot walk, he can ride; if a man's right arm be broken, let him use his left; if his eyes be put out, his ears will hear but the better—let him use them. Our manifold senses are but manifold capabilities; and if the mind is

debarred from using one of its tools, it must use another. No man need want employment for the senses, the limbs, and the means that he has left, if he chooses to seek for it. For awhile I shall be of no good upon the mountain, and therefore I am going to the city. Some time or another, I must go, and therefore I may as well go now. But here comes the old woman with my mess of food. You must take some with me. No one knows better than she does how to cook the chamois, or the venison, or to roast the shining trout in the ashes, or the snow fowl over the fire; and as for wine, the cellar of an archbishop or of a prior of a monastery could not give you better than this lonely house can produce. Nay, nay, shake not your head, you must eat and drink, let your impatience be what it may: every man needs strength; and that we should take food is a condition of our flesh and blood."

In conversation of this kind passed away the hours, Bernard de Rohan and his strange companion remaining almost altogether alone, though once two young men, dressed like herdsmen, came to the door of the room, and leaning against the door-posts, addressed to Corse de Leon a few words, apparently of no great import, and upon ordinary subjects; but to which Bernard de Rohan imagined some occult meaning was attached.

At length, much to the satisfaction of the young cavalier, a perceptible shade of twilight came over the valley, along which the shadows of the hills had been creeping for some time. The twilight grew greyer and more grey, and Bernard de Rohan rose and walked to the window, with his impatience for the arrival of the horses increasing every moment. Corse de Leon was looking at him with a slight smile when he turned round; but in a few minutes after, the Brigand rose, left the room, and returned with the two young men whom Bernard de Rohan had seen before. They were now loaded, however, with various kinds of arms and habiliments of different sorts, which seemed to have been gathered from many a quarter of the earth. These were spread out, some upon the table and some on the floor; and this being performed without a word, those who bore them retired, only appearing again to furnish the chamber with a light.

Corse de Leon glanced his eye to the young cavalier, and then gazed upon the pile with a somewhat cynical smile.

"This seems to be an abundant harvest," said Bernard de Rohan, whose doubts as to the means employed to procure such rich habiliments were many.

"You say true," replied the Brigand; "but you must re-

member, we are many reapers. This has been going on, too, for very many years, so that you will find here garments of various ages and of different nations. Look here," he continued, taking up a black velvet surtout, richly embroidered with gold. "This is a coat cut in the fashion of forty or fifty years ago, and belonged to some fat Englishman, who doubtless came over to France with that arch heretic and bloodmonger Henry, who has not been many years dead. Then, depend upon it, he would see foreign countries, and go to Italy, and has left part of his fine wardrobe here behind him in the mountains."

"An unwilling legacy, I should think," replied Bernard de Rohan.

"Yes," answered the Brigand; "but that is not a shot-hole you are looking at so curiously. Our traditions say, I believe—for we have our traditions—that the good gentleman got safe home, though somewhat thinner of purse and scantier in apparel than when he came away. However, choose yourself out some quiet suit that will not attract attention, for you must not go riding through France like a Savoyard peasant. There, that black hat and feather, which would become some sober student of Padua, making his first effort to look the cavalier. Then there is that stout buff coat I would recommend, with black loops and borders. Ay, it is somewhat heavy, but there is a secret in that: dagger or sword point will not well make its way through the jacked doublings of those hides, and a pistol ball would strike but faintly, even if it did pass. Then there are those horsemen's boots: they will be no bad addition to the rest. That long sharp sword, too, in the black sheath, will suit the hat, and none the less fit the hand. It is true Toledo. Now, seek for two daggers somewhat like it, and a pair of pistols for the saddle-bow. By the Lord that lives, if the horse they bring be but a grey Spanish charger, with a tail longer than ordinary, they will take you for some one who has been studying the black art at Salamanca, or perhaps for some lay officer of the inquisition in disguise.—Is the coat large enough? Oh, ay! it fits well. Now for a cloak to match."

With the assistance of his companion, Bernard de Rohan fitted himself with new garments, which somewhat disguised, but did not ill become his powerful form. After he had done, the Brigand opened the mouth of a little sack which had been brought with the rest, saying, "Take what you will: you can repay me hereafter."

The young cavalier, however, took no more of the gold pieces which appeared shining within, than was absolutely

necessary, replying to the remonstrance of Corse de Leon that, as he approached nearer to Paris, there were many who would be willing to assist him.

"Well, well," replied the Brigand, "it matters not. I shall not be far from you. But now let us away. I hear the horses, and you are impatient to be gone. We can meet them, therefore, as they come."

Though Bernard de Rohan heard nothing of the sounds which his companion's fine ear had discovered, he gladly followed him out to the mountain road, and walked on with him for some way before the horses appeared. Their feet were soon heard, however; and at length a man, mounted on a charger, and leading another, was seen coming rapidly towards them. The animal he led was powerful, and yet apparently swift: some short time was spent in adjusting the arms and the stirrups; and then, after offering many thanks to his strange companion for all that he had done, Bernard de Rohan grasped his hand, sprang into the saddle, and rode away in the direction of Chambery.

CHAPTER XX.

It was in a small cabinet in the princely château of Fontainebleau, some eight days after the grand entertainment at the Louvre which we have before mentioned, that Henry the Second of France was seated conversing with one of his most trusted servants and most faithful friends, the well-known Maréchal de Vieilleville. The cabinet, the ceiling of which was of dark black oak, carved and ornamented with small stars of gold, was hung with rich, but very ancient tapestry, still beautiful, though the colours had faded in the passing of years. The dark green which formed the principal hue was no longer enlivened by the gorgeous red and yellow draperies, which had once ornamented the principal figures, and a dim and melancholy hue pervaded the room, to which the fact of the light passing through some leafy trees without, did not a little contribute.

It was not, however, the peculiar colouring of the hangings, nor the light passing through the green trees, that gave an unusual paleness to the countenance of the King, as, laying down the pen with which he had been writing, he gazed up in the face of Vieilleville,—"What is it you tell me, Maréchal?" he said. "Dead? Crushed under one of the

towers of the castle? The very best and most promising soldier France could produce! The dear friend of Brissac —lauded even by Montmorency! Heaven and earth! Did you say he was returned, this Lord of Masseran? Send for him instantly. Let a messenger be despatched to the capital at once. By my crown, if I thought that he had any hand in this, I would have his head off in the court before to-morrow's sun set. Send off a messenger for him, I say!"

"Sire, he is even now in the palace," replied the Maréchal. "It was seeing him pass along the court, in order to crave an audience, that made me intrude upon your majesty just now. I heard this sad business last night by a letter from Brissac; but I would not tell your majesty, lest it should spoil your rest after so bustling a day."

"What, you are one of those, Vieilleville, are you," said the King, with a slight smile, "who can believe that the death of a faithful subject may chase slumber from even a royal pillow?—However, these despatches must be written. Leave me for an hour, and then bring hither this Lord of Masseran. Keep a good eye upon him, for he is as deceitful as a cat: but he shall find that I am not to be trifled with."

"I will venture to beseech you, sire," said the statesman, "in all that you do with this man, to recollect that he is himself a sovereign prince; for were you to forget it, the example might be dangerous."

"If I make him an example, it shall be for good, not for evil, Vieilleville," replied the King. "Some of these petty princes need an example how they may be punished for treachery and double-dealing. I have heard more of him since he last set out for Savoy than I ever did before, and I much doubted that he would return to France again. But watch him well, good Vieilleville, and bring him hither in an hour. I shall have finished ere that."

The Maréchal withdrew; and ere the hour was expired, a page sought him again from the King, requiring his presence, with that of the Lord of Masseran, whom Vieilleville, on quitting the cabinet, had informed that Henry could not yet receive him.

The angry spot was still upon the King's brow when they entered; but he spoke to the Lord of Masseran in a courteous tone, saying, "Well, my good lord, this is somewhat unexpected. I knew not that you could go to Savoy and return so quickly. How is it that you have shortened the way so well?"

"A melancholy interruption, sire," replied the Savoyard.

"A melancholy interruption caused me to return ere half my journey was complete. Somewhat on this side of Lyons, I met a messenger coming with all speed to seek me, and bearing me this letter, which I beg to lay at your majesty's feet."

The King took it and read, examining every line as he did so, in order to see whether it bore about it the marks of truth and authenticity. There was nothing, however, to make him doubt it. It seemed simply a letter from some seneschal or other officer, left behind by the Lord of Masseran to command during his absence, announcing to him that the prison tower of the castle had taken fire and fallen, crushing under its ruins the chamber in which the young Baron de Rohan had been confined. It went on to state that works had been already commenced to supply its place in the walls, and gave some account of the probable expense which those works would occasion.

"That would be dear," muttered Henry, in a low voice, and between his teeth—" that would be dear payment to get rid of a troublesome friend. I rather suspect it can be done cheaper in Savoy. Have you no news, Monsieur de Masseran," he said, aloud, "of how this terrible catastrophe occurred?"

"I have shown your majesty all the information I have received," replied the Marquis of Masseran. "I returned to Paris with all speed after having met with the messenger, and not finding you there, came hither."

"What say you, De Vieilleville?" said the King; "you had letters last night, methinks, from some one in that neighbourhood."

"They bear the same sad news, sire," replied the Maréchal de Vieilleville. "But they add, that everybody in that country marvelled much how this event could have occurred in a tower detached from the castle, built almost entirely of stone, and doubtless intrusted to a faithful guard."

"It is, indeed, most strange," said the Marquis of Masseran, thoughtfully. "There must have been some base neglect."

"This must be inquired into," said the King; "this must be inquired into. My good Lord of Vieilleville, call the page for these despatches. It behoves you, my Lord of Masseran, to make strict and immediate inquiry into the whole of this affair, in which you shall be aided and assisted by a commissary on our part.—There are the despatches, boy.—Why wait you? What is it now?"

"May it please your majesty," replied the page, "there is a lady without craving earnestly to see you. She calls her-

self the sister of the Count of Brienne, and I remember her well at the court some months ago. She seems in much grief, and——"

"Give her admission," said the King—"give her instant admission; she may throw some light upon all this affair, my good Lord of Masseran."

The Marquis turned somewhat pale; for the appearance of Isabel of Brienne in the King's presence was not at all what he wished or calculated upon. He had hoped for an opportunity of telling his own tale, and causing his wife to tell hers, so as to corroborate all he said, without the actual appearance of Isabel herself. He knew that the Count de Meyrand, though apparently taking no part in all that occurred since their arrival in Paris, had been continually and skilfully preparing the way for the development of his part in the transaction; had been labouring to make friends and gain supporters amongst those who possessed the King's ear, and had been apparently not a little successful even with the fair Duchess of Valentinois herself.

It must not be supposed, however, that good Monsieur de Masseran was moved by any personal love or regard for the Count de Meyrand: there was but one tie between them—the tie of interest; and the moment that the Lord of Masseran saw that more was to be lost or risked by the Count de Meyrand than to be gained, that instant he was prepared to put an end to his affection for his noble friend. He was, however, as we have seen, in various respects in the Count's power; and he had trusted that their united operations would be sufficient to induce the King to act without listening to the fair girl herself. He had moreover believed, when he heard of the death of Bernard de Rohan, that one great obstacle being removed, the rest would be comparatively easy. The arrival of Isabel, however, was most inopportune, for he saw that, in the King's angry mood at the moment, the disclosure of all that had taken place within the last few weeks might be ruinous in another way, and not only overthrow his future schemes with regard to Mademoiselle de Brienne herself, but bring punishment on his head for what had occurred before.

As the interview, however, could be prevented by no means within his reach, he sought eagerly in his mind for excuses and defences for his conduct; but he had hardly time to arrange any plan, ere Isabel herself entered, supported by the arm of one whom he felt far more inclined to fear than even herself. That person was good Father Willand; and his

surprise and dismay were not a little increased by seeing the King receive the priest with a gracious smile, as an old acquaintance, and, grasping his arm familiarly, ask him what had made him return from banishment.

"Why, to bring this poor lamb back to your majesty's fold," replied Father Willand, in his usual gay and unceremonious tone. "By my faith, sire, if all shepherds were like you, and mistook the wolf for the watch-dog, mutton would soon be dear in France."

"How so—how so, good father?" demanded Henry, laughing; and at the same time taking Isabel's hand in his own, he prevented her with a kindly gesture from throwing herself at his feet. "Cheer up, fair lady," he said, "cheer up. The King will protect you, and be a father to you.—But how now, bold priest? How have I been so unwise a shepherd as to mistake the wolf for the watch-dog?"

"Why," answered Father Willand, boldly, and looking full in the face of the Lord of Masseran, "by giving one of the best of your flock"—and he pointed with his hand to Isabel—"into the care of a Savoyard wolf."

"Hush! hush! my good father," cried the King. "By heavens! if you use such language, you will get yourself into a worse scrape, in your cure of Saint John of Bonvoisin, than that for which I was obliged to send you away from Paris, to keep your ears out of the way of knives. On my soul, we must find a bridle for that tongue of yours."

"Indeed, sire," exclaimed the Lord of Masseran, marking with pleasure a slight frown that had come upon the King's brow—"indeed, sire, such a bridle is most necessary; for that tongue is not only insolent but mendacious."

"Hush, sir!" exclaimed the King, sternly; "you speak of one of the honestest men in France," and he held out his hand to Father Willand, who kissed it respectfully. "Would that we had many such!" the King went on; "for the men who tell truth in the cabinet as well as in the pulpit are those that are very needful here: albeit," he added, with a smile, "they may occasionally, in their hatred of hypocrites and knaves, give their tongue some licence, and their conduct too. However, my good father, you will never be wise, so that I fear some day I shall have to make you a bishop, merely to keep you out of the way of strong fists and crabsticks. Now let us turn to the case of this young lady. The page told me, fair one, that you were anxious to see me immediately. What is it you would have?"

"Protection, sire," replied Isabel de Brienne, raising her

fair face towards the King, filled with an expression of deep and hopeless grief, which touched the kind heart of the monarch, and made his tone even more kindly than it was before, as he replied,—

"And you shall have it, lady. But let me hear how it is that protection is needed. Have you not a mother and a brother to protect and help you?"

"Alas, sire!" replied Isabel of Brienne, "my mother is no more my father's wife, nor my father's widow. She is now the wife of one to whose will she shows all dutiful obedience; but unto me the mother's care and tenderness are at an end."

"Fair lady," said the King, "the time that I can spare you is but short, and it may save you both trouble and grief, and, perhaps, from one cause or another, may likewise spare you a blush, if I tell you that I know the past. Lest you should suspect that my ears have been wronged, and your conduct falsely told, the brief history of the facts is this:—you have loved and been beloved by a very gallant gentleman, one who has served his king and country well and faithfully; and your mother, not holding him as dearly and highly as we may do, or you have done, has opposed your marriage with the man of your choice, and endeavoured, as far as may be, to separate you from him. He, in the somewhat indiscreet eagerness of love, persuaded you, it would seem, to fly with him secretly, and unite your fate to his by a clandestine marriage, which, upon every principle of law and reason, must be null and void. However, at the very altar, I am told, your worthy stepfather here present surprised and separated you from this bold gentleman, took means to insure that you should not meet again, and was bringing or sending you to Paris, when you contrived to escape. Thus far we know; what is there more? The tale that we have heard is very simple."

As the King ended, he looked round with a slight smile, which certainly might be interpreted either, "This matter is very clear," or else, "I know there is another version."

The person who answered it first, however, was the good priest. "That is the story, sire," he said. "'Tis a most excellent piece of goods, but smells somewhat of the manufacturer."

"How so, sir? But let the lady speak, and say if this be true or not."

"True, sire," replied Isabel de Brienne, much to the surprise of the Lord of Masseran. "It is all true; but there is

much besides to be said, and some things which I must say, but which, perhaps, I cannot prove, especially now, when deep grief masters me. As your majesty has said—and no blush will stain my cheek while I do own it—I loved and was beloved by as noble a gentleman as ever graced this land; but I trust that I loved him wisely too, for to that love I have been plighted since my fifteenth year. My father—my good father, sire, who in times past has stricken in many a battle by your side, and also, in many another well-fought field—joined my hand to his with promises which I his daughter was but too willing to fulfil. My mother, it is true, always looked somewhat coldly on him I loved, ever since he struck to the ground a base man, her intendant, for wronging an unprotected girl; but still my mother was present when we were plighted to each other; still she was present when my father, on his death-bed, made me promise that I would wed the man whom he had chosen. Oh, how willingly I promised!—oh, how gladly I would have kept that promise! But they have rendered it vain!" And unable to restrain herself, the tears burst forth, and she wept bitterly.

Henry had carried his eyes from her to the countenance of the Lord of Masseran from time to time while she spoke, and now, taking her hand kindly, he said, "Be comforted, dear lady, be comforted. This changes the matter greatly. What else have you to add?"

"Oh much, much, sire," replied Isabel, wiping the tears from her eyes; "but I will be brief, sire; indeed, I will be brief, and not waste your most precious time. Bernard de Rohan, my promised husband, went to serve his king in Italy——"

"And did serve him there right well," said the King. "But go on."

"He had been absent some time," she continued, "and I was longing for his return, when a nobleman of your majesty's court sought my hand, to my great surprise, with my mother's countenance. Thinking that he had been deceived, I told him the whole truth, but still he pursued his suit. I wish, sire, that it were not needful for me to give his name, but I fear I must."

"The Count de Meyrand," said the King. "He has already urged his suit to us. What more of him, fair lady?"

"He urged it upon me, sire," she answered, "after he knew that my heart was given, and my hand was promised, to another,—that other being his own friend. He sought me, sire, he persecuted me, he used words that I will not

repeat, nay, menaces, all with the countenance of my mother, who acted, I believe—nay, I know—under the commands of her new husband. I was in hopes of some relief when my Lord of Masseran here took us so suddenly to Savoy, but we were soon followed by the gentleman you have named. I was now told to think no more of Bernard de Rohan. I was informed that my hand was destined for the man whom, by this time, I detested, and that means would be found to make me obey. Vague and terrible fears came over me; but I obtained an opportunity of writing one letter to him I loved. Would that I had never done so! for that letter has killed him."

"Methinks, sire, it would have been better," said the Lord of Masseran, in a sneering tone, "if the fair lady was so tyrannically used in my poor dwelling, to write to her brother in the capital."

"I did," replied Isabel de Brienne, "often and most sorrowfully."

"But did you ever ask him to come to you?" demanded the Lord of Masseran. "He says not."

"Never," replied Isabel of Brienne. "On the contrary, I besought him not to come. I concealed half my grief, the daily anguish of witnessing my mother's sorrow, the taunts, the sneers, the bitterness, which, like the Egyptian pestilence, made our very food swarm with reptiles—I concealed much, much that I might have told, and still besought him not to come."

"May I ask why, madam?" said the King, with evident surprise. "De Vieilleville, there is something under this. I must hear the whole," he added, seeing her hesitate. "Lady, it must be told."

"It was, sire," said Isabel de Brienne, in a low but distinct voice—"it was, that I feared if brother and sister should be in the same house, beyond the pale of your majesty's realm—in a place where few questions are asked, and secret acts do not easily transpire—I feared—I say, I feared much for my brother's safety."

"I understand," said the King, "I understand. But there must be great objects for such doings."

"Everything reverts, sire," said Vieilleville, addressing the King in a low voice—"everything reverts to the mother in case of the death of the son and daughter without children."

"These, sire, however," said Isabel, "were but suspicions, and perhaps were unjust——"

"Oh, most unjust, I do assure your majesty," said the Lord of Masseran, who had more than once shown a disposition to break in, but had been restrained by a gesture from the King. "Such base designs never entered my mind."

"Perhaps such suspicions were unjust, sire," continued Isabel. "But to speak of facts. I had been forced out more than once to hunting parties where the Count of Meyrand joined us; and at length, on one occasion, I was told that I must needs go forth with my Lord of Masseran to visit a house of his, farther in the mountains. I went with fear, sire, on many accounts. First, the hour he chose was strange, just before sunset; next, my mother was not with us, and next, the train appointed to accompany us was smaller than usual. Scarcely had night fallen, when we were suddenly attacked and overpowered by a large body of men ——"

"Was this with violence?" demanded the King. "Was any one killed or hurt?"

"None, but some of the old and faithful servants of my family," replied the young lady, "who forgot where they were, and how situated, and defended their young mistress with their lives. One of them escaped, and fled to a little inn for help; but in the meantime we were, as I have said, overpowered and carried off farther into the hills, my Lord of Masseran as well as myself; though I cannot help thinking that he went somewhat willingly, for certainly amongst the assailants there was one, if not more, of the attendants of his good friend the Count de Meyrand. When we had gone some way—a long way, indeed, it seemed to me—a cavalier who had been found at the inn, none other than Monsieur de Rohan, came to our rescue, having gathered together a number of persons sufficient to deliver us."

"A number of brigands!" said the Lord of Masseran, interrupting her—"brigands, you mean, young lady! brigands!"

"Ha! ha!" cried the priest, "wonderfully good! That bolt was smartly shot, my good Lord of Masseran. But as you have put a word to the lady's story, I will put another; she says 'persons,' you say 'brigands;' I say, anybody he could get. I was one of the number: there were other people from the inn, and the brigands, it is very true, came and joined us; not liking, as your majesty may easily conceive, that the good Lord of Masseran, or any other lord, should take their trade out of their hands. However, we refused no help where we could get it. The Chevalier de

Meyrand, who was at the inn when the man came crying for aid, remained at the table with the capons, and the bottles of wine, not liking, as may well be supposed, to frustrate his own schemes, or fight against his own people; and Bernard de Rohan, with what assistance he could get, set free the young lady, ay, and the Lord of Masseran to boot."

"Then there were, in truth, brigands with you, my good father?" said the King.

"In sooth were there, sire," replied the priest; "some of the best brigands between this and Naples; and I have a shrewd notion that Corse de Leon was there himself."

"Indeed!" said the King, with a smile; "then I wish I had been there also: I would give half a province to see that man, who seems to have been born for a general, and become a brigand by accident."

"Brissac writes me word, sire," said the Maréchal de Vieilleville, "that Corse de Leon has served you better in Piedmont than any three captains in your service."

"That may well be," said the King; "but yet we must not too openly favour such gentry.—Now, lady, we have interrupted you too long."

"I have but little more to say, sire," replied Isabel de Brienne. "As those who had delivered us were carrying us back to the castle in safety, I had full opportunity—the first time for years—of speaking with my promised husband, who informed me that he came, not alone to seek my hand, but to bear despatches from Monsieur de Brissac to my Lord of Masseran there. What I have to tell farther is not altogether of my own knowledge; but let him deny the facts if he can, for there are persons who can prove them if he does deny them. He received intelligence that Monsieur de Rohan brought him despatches and directions of an unpleasant kind, and he left the château that he might not receive them. He also ordered that admittance should be refused both to my mother and myself; and I had reason to believe that a new scheme was formed for compelling me to wed the Count de Meyrand. In these circumstances, your majesty, I saw no chance of escape but in doing as I did do. I was far from your protecting arm; I was, in fact, in the power, and at the disposal, not of my mother, but of a stranger to our house and nation; and I knew that if I delayed or hesitated, even for a few days, I was likely to be borne far away beyond the power of rescue or deliverance. I held that my father's will and wishes justified me in what, at other times, might have been a rash, perhaps an improper act; and having the op-

portunity both of seeing him I loved and escaping with him, I did not hesitate: our purpose being immediately to seek your presence, and cast ourselves at your majesty's feet, entreating your gracious pardon. We were afterwards seized at the altar, as your majesty has been told; and I was then carried away, as if with the purpose of taking me to some remote place, but, in reality, to give the opportunity of a mock deliverance by the Count of Meyrand." And she gave a brief account of what had taken place after the Count came apparently to her rescue. "I doubt not that he was carrying me to Paris," she continued, "and might ultimately have brought me to your majesty's presence; but I neither chose to be entirely in his power, and at his disposal, after all that had happened, nor to quit that part of the country where I had reason to believe my brother was or might soon be, and where my husband—yes, sire, my husband, for a vow had been spoken which nothing but death could do away—where my husband lay a captive in the hands of that dangerous man. With the aid of Father Willand here, I made my escape; but alas! alas! it was only to find that he who had loved me well and truly was no longer in life to protect and guide me. I found, sire, that he had died a horrible death in the castle of Masseran, by the falling of the tower under which he was confined."

She spoke, to all appearance, calmly; even the last words were distinct, though low; but she kept her eyes bent down, and, closing them for a moment, the drops of tears broke through the long black lashes like a crushed diamond.

"I grieve for you, dear lady," said the King, "and I sympathize with you also; for I loved this young gentleman well. But tell me, have you any suspicion that his death was brought about unfairly?"

"No, sire, no," she replied; "I have no cause to suppose so. I know nothing farther than that it is as I have told you."

"You see, sire," said the Lord of Masseran, "that she exculpates me from blame in this matter."

"No, my lord, no," replied the King. "Of the manner of this gentleman's death she knows nothing; but in regard to your preceding conduct, she does anything but exculpate you. She says, or I am mistaken, that she had good reason to know a scheme had been formed for compelling her to marry the Count de Meyrand, and also for bearing her far away beyond the possibility of rescue or deliverance. Call you this exculpating you?"

"But I deny that this is the case, sire," replied the Lord of Masseran. "How could she tell what were my schemes or what were my plans? These are but vague suspicions, engendered by disappointment and anger."

"No, my lord, they are not," replied Isabel de Brienne; "they are not vague suspicions: they are certainties which I have never yet fully told to any one; no, not even to him I loved, because you are my mother's husband; but may I put you in mind of a German courier who was with you secretly on the twenty-ninth of last month—not the first that came that day—ay, and of the Spaniard who came two days afterwards ——"

The Lord of Masseran turned paler than his ruff, and clasped his hands together, as if about to pray for mercy; but Isabel went on, "With his majesty's permission, I will first tell you in your ear, my lord, what I know of those couriers. Then, if you will have it so, and still deny the fact, I will speak aloud, and call on those who can prove it."

The King bowed his head in token of consent; and while Isabel spoke for a few moments with the Lord of Masseran apart, he said to Vieilleville, with a thoughtful look, "You see Brissac's information was good."

"Might it not be better, sire," said Vieilleville, "to send this man for a few days to the Bastile, in order to ascertain how the case now stands?"

"It is not worth while," replied the King, in the same under voice; "the treaty will so soon be concluded, that he can do no mischief, especially while we keep him about the court. On the contrary, Vieilleville, I hope and trust he will not drive this poor girl to say any more; for I suspect, if she were to tell all, I should be obliged to punish him; and that same sword of justice is the heaviest and most unpleasant one to wield I know. Well, fair lady, does your penitent admit the facts?"

"He does not deny, my lord," replied Isabel de Brienne, "that I had good cause for suspicion; and he has moreover promised me, both in his own name and in that of my mother, that I shall never be farther pressed to give my hand to any one, but shall be permitted to do the only thing that now remains for me to do in life; to retire from a world where I have known little but sorrow, and vow myself to the altar for ever."

"Nay, nay," said the King; "not so, fair lady; not so. We will have you think of this better. Such charms as yours were never made for the cloister. At all events, let the first

shadow of this grief pass away; you know not what may happen to change your views."

"Nothing can ever do so, sire," replied Isabel de Brienne. "Your majesty must not forget, that with him who is gone I have been brought up all my life. The sweet years of childhood—the happiest period that I have ever known—are in remembrance, full of him and of his affection. To him all my thoughts have been given, all my wishes linked from childhood until now: the thoughts so nurtured have become part of my being. His glory I have felt as my glory, his happiness I have prayed for before my own, and his praise has been to my heart the most tuneful of all sounds. I can never think otherwise than I have thought, sire; and I will beseech your majesty not to give this good Lord of Masseran any motive to withdraw the word that he has plighted to me."

"Nay, I will not do that," replied the King. "I will hold him bound by that word, that neither he nor your mother shall offer any opposition to your wishes in this respect; but still, at the King's request, you must delay the execution of such a scheme, at least for a short time."

"I fear, sire," said the Lord of Masseran, "that it will be in vain. As your majesty well knows, and as I do not scruple to confess, I had other views and wishes for her; but I know that she is of so fixed and determined a nature, that when, believing she is right, she has made up her mind to a certain course of action, nothing will move her to abandon it."

"We shall see, we shall see," said the King. "I would fain not lose one of the brightest ornaments of our court.—Vieilleville," he continued, "unto your care I will commend this young lady. Take her with you to the apartments of your daughter, and of my daughter Claude. Bid the Princess love her and soothe her, and consult with the Queen where she can best be placed in the château, so as to have comfort, and ease, and repose, with as little of the bustle and gaiety of a court as may be, for the time. Such things will be harsh to you, I know, young lady. Monsieur de Masseran, we will be father and mother also to her for a while. Father Willand, let me see you at nightfall; I have somewhat to say to you, my good friend."

"I shall make the almoner in waiting jealous," said Father Willand; "but I hope your majesty will order me some dinner; for I doubt much if, in your whole palace, I should find any one charitable enough to bestow an alms on a poor wandering priest like myself."

"You are mistaken, good father," said Vieilleville. "You will find your cover at my table. Come with me; we must no farther occupy his majesty's time."

Thus saying, he led Isabel de Brienne to the door; but before he had gone out, the King called him back, and said, in a low voice, "Do not let the Savoyard quit the court. Should need be, tell him I require his presence the day after to-morrow. Discourage these ideas of nunneries. Poor Meyrand is madly in love with this girl; and it is strange to see how passion mixes itself up with his supercilious air of indifference. Perhaps she may be brought to yield."

"I think not, sire," replied Vieilleville, bluntly; and with a low bow left the room.

CHAPTER XXI.

The horse was strong and fresh, and Bernard de Rohan rode on rapidly. The stars came out brighter and brighter, as the night deepened, and the clear, deep, lustrous purple of those fair southern skies became mingled with yellow light, as the moon, looking large and defined, rose over the deep black summits of the eastern hills. It was not long before the French frontier was passed; and in those days, as Savoy was completely in the occupation of the French, no guards watched upon the way to stop or question the stranger coming from the neighbouring land.

Judging the distance which Isabel must have gone, even at a slow pace, to be considerable, Bernard de Rohan did not think fit to pause at any of the first towns or villages which he met with, but avoiding man's habitation as far as possible, went on till his horse's speed began to flag, and he found it necessary to stop for repose and refreshment. He had now gone on, however, for about five hours, so that it was by this time the middle of the night, and with difficulty he made himself heard in a small hamlet on the road to Grenoble. He procured, at length, some refreshment for himself and for his horse, but no tidings whatsoever which could lead him to judge whether Isabel and his servants had, or had not, taken the same road which he himself was following. He remained, however, for two hours, to allow the horse time to rest, and then once more putting his foot in the stirrup, rode onward at a slower pace.

About an hour after, the day once more began to dawn,

and he found himself winding in and out amongst the beautiful hills which border the Isere. Everything was rich, and fertile, and picturesque, and upon those scenes the eye of Bernard de Rohan could have rested with infinite pleasure at any other time; but now anxious eagerness hurried him on, scarcely remarking the objects around for any other purpose than to judge where he was, and how far from Grenoble. A little after five in the morning, he passed through the small village of Montbonnat, and heard with gladness the assurance of the people of the place that he was not much more than two leagues from Grenoble.

After giving his horse a draught of water, he went on his way again through that beautiful district of streams and mountains, constantly ascending and descending, till at length, not far from the hamlet of Imfray, he saw before him a single horseman coming slowly on, the first person, in fact, whom he had met upon the road since he had set out the night before.

When the young cavalier first perceived him, the man was at the distance of some two hundred yards; but it was with no small pleasure that Bernard de Rohan at once recognised one of his own servants, named Pierre Millort, an honest but somewhat weak man, who had been born upon his own estates, and had served him for many years. He now felt certain of obtaining speedy news of Isabel de Brienne, and rode directly towards the other horseman, expecting that the man would remember his lord's person at once. The young nobleman, however, dressed in the habit which had been given him by Corse de Leon, bore not at all his usual aspect, and good Peter Millort also devoutly believed him to be dead. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that he looked upon the person who approached him as a complete stranger; and fancying that there was something in his appearance of a very doubtful nature, he drew his sword a little forward, as he saw the strange cavalier riding directly up to him, and prepared to defend himself, in case of need, as well as might be.

When Bernard de Rohan called him by his name, however, asking if he did not recollect him, astonishment, not a little mingled with superstitious fear, made the man nearly fall from his horse, and he felt strongly inclined to argue the matter with his young master, in order to persuade him that he was really dead. At length, becoming fully convinced that such was not the case, and that Bernard himself, in a bodily and corporeal form, was before his eyes, he gave him

the information which he desired regarding Isabel de Brienne, though that information was by no means satisfactory to the young cavalier.

The lady had arrived at Grenoble, he said, on the very same day that she had set out from Gandelot's inn; but finding that her brother was not there, and had not sent any notice of his coming to the house in the city where she expected to hear of him, she had taken her departure on the following morning, in order to reach the capital and throw herself upon the protection of the King as speedily as possible. She hoped to arrive at Vienne in one day, the man continued, and had sent him off at once to convey intelligence of her route to somebody he was to meet at Gandelot's inn.

"Then how happened you not to be there last night?" demanded Bernard de Rohan. "Had you pursued your journey, you would have saved me the trouble of coming to Grenoble, and would have enabled me to cut across the country and join her at Vienne this morning. Now she will be two whole days in advance of me."

"And not a horse will you get in Grenoble with which to pursue your way," replied the man; "for that's the reason, sir, why I did not come on at once."

"Had you not your own horse?" demanded Bernard de Rohan, somewhat angrily.

"Yes, sir," answered the servant, "I had; but a sad accident happened to him, poor fellow. I left Grenoble at the very same moment that the lady set out for Vienne, but I had not got far beyond La Tronche, when the road being covered with loose stones which had rolled down from the hill, my horse slipped and fell, cutting both his knees to pieces. I was obliged to lead him back into the town, and no horse could I get for love or money, till at length I made a bargain with a peasant from Bachat to change with me, he taking my fine beast on the chance of curing him, and giving me this wretched animal in his stead, to enable me to go on my way. It is not, however, an hour since he brought the beast in. So you see, sir, I have lost no time."

"That is enough," said Bernard de Rohan, thoughtfully; "that is enough. I must go on to Grenoble now, however. Come with me; you will not be wanted at Gandelot's inn;" and thus saying, he rode on to the town, where it was necessary to give his own horse a long time to rest, for the distance which he had come was more than fifty miles, and the road steep, difficult, and fatiguing.

Judging by the rate at which Isabel was proceeding, it

was clear that she must reach Lyons before that day closed; for though she might not accomplish her purpose of arriving at Vienne on the day before, yet the distance to Lyons itself was but two easy days' journey.

Every means that long military experience suggested was employed by Bernard de Rohan to refresh and invigorate his horse more speedily, and those means were very successful, although some of them may appear to us, in this age, somewhat fantastic. Balls of spice were given to the animal, his feet and pasterns were bathed in red wine, and various other proceedings of the same kind were adopted with a similar view. It was impossible, however, to go on till towards the evening, and even then the young cavalier found that it was in vain to seek Vienne that night, as neither his own horse nor that of his attendant could accomplish the distance. They proceeded as far as possible, however, so as to leave a moderate day's journey between them and Lyons, and on the succeeding evening Bernard de Rohan had the pleasure of seeing the fair city of the Rhone spread out before his eyes, and of knowing that there could not well be more than one day's journey between him and her he loved.

The great difficulty, however, now was to discover at what inn Isabel had lodged on the preceding night, in order to ascertain what route she had followed on her farther journey. Lyons, even at that time, was a very large and important city, filled with inns of every sort and description; and as in those days despotic suspicion had not invented the fetter-lock of passports; as there was no tyrannical police, no licensed spies to whom the abode of every citizen, the sleeping-place of every traveller, the movements of every being in the realm were known, as is now the case in France, Bernard de Rohan had no other means of ascertaining the resting-place of Isabel during the preceding night, than his own conjectures or inquiries made at all the principal places of public reception.

When he had himself passed through Lyons some time before, he had been in command of a considerable body of soldiers, and had lodged at an inn in the suburb of La Guillotiere. That suburb was not so large in those days as at present; but it possessed at that period one of the best inns which Lyons could boast of; and as the servants who now accompanied Isabel de Brienne were then with him and he had remained for several days there, he judged it not at all unlikely that they might have conducted his fair bride to the resting-place where they had previously lodged. He rode,

then, directly to the same inn, which was surrounded by its own court and gardens; but the faces that presented themselves were strange to him; for amongst all the mutable things of this earth there are few more mutable than the servants of an inn.

In general, at all the auberges on the road, a man on horseback was sure to meet with attention and good treatment; but in such a city as Lyons, luxury had of course brought fastidious notions along with it; and the frequent visits of persons with large trains, ladies in immense rumbling carriages or clumsy horse litters, made the horseman with his single attendant and weary horses an object of very little importance in the eyes of the drawers and ostlers.

Perceiving some slackness of civility, the young cavalier ordered the host to be sent to him, and the landlord of the Checkers, for so the inn was called, presented himself, gazing upon the young gentleman at first as a perfect stranger. A moment after, however, the face of the Baron de Rohan came to his remembrance, at first connecting itself vaguely with considerable sums of money received, and numerous expensive attendants, horses, arms, banners, *et cetera;* so that his satellites were very soon surprised by seeing various low and profound inclinations of his head, as he welcomed "his lordship" back to Lyons; hoped that the campaign had gone well with him. Gradually recollecting more of the circumstances, he recalled even his visitor's name itself, and in tones of indignant haste bade the stable-boys take Monseigneur de Rohan's horses, and the chamberlain show monseigneur himself to the best apartments of the inn, while he followed, bowing lowly every time the young cavalier turned round.

Bernard de Rohan's first inquiries were for Isabel de Brienne; but the good host was far too wise and practised in his profession to satisfy the young gentleman fully before he had fixed him at his own inn. Oh, yes, undoubtedly, he said, such a lady had been there, and had set off that very morning, with just such attendants as monseigneur described. He would come back and tell him more, he continued, in one minute, when he had merely given orders for a nice little supper to be sent up, and had seen that the horses were properly cared for. But when he at length made his appearance, after being absent till the supper he talked of was nearly ready, and the young gentleman actually sent for him, it then turned out, of course, that the lady he spoke of was quite a different person, some forty years of age, and the widow of some famous marshal, dead many years before.

Bernard de Rohan was disappointed, but he did not suffer his equanimity to be disturbed at finding some little want of sincerity in an innkeeper. He partook but lightly, however, of the good host's supper; and then, directing the attendant who accompanied him to make inquiries at all the inns in the suburb where they then were, he himself set out on foot, and passing the bridge, pursued the search throughout the town of Lyons. That search, however, proved vain; and not the slightest tidings of Isabel and her train had Bernard de Rohan been able to find before the sun went down.

He was preparing to return to the inn, in the hope that his servant might have been more successful than himself, when, in passing down one of the long narrow streets which led from the great square, he was met by a crowd of people so dense, that he found it would be absolutely impossible to traverse it, and he accordingly turned (little caring what had caused the assemblage) in order to pass round by the church of the Feuillans, and make his way homeward by another street.

The pavement of the good town of Lyons is by no means pleasant or easy to walk upon, in the present day, being entirely composed of round slippery stones, on which the feet seem to have no hold. In those times it was even worse, for it was irregular in construction, as well as bad in material; and Bernard de Rohan himself, though strong and active, found it no easy task to outwalk, even by a pace or two, a crowd of persons better accustomed to tread those streets than himself. He had contrived to get a few steps in advance, however, and had reached the long narrow street which passes round by the side of the church, when he was stopped just as he was about to pass down it by another crowd as dense as the first, by which he was forcibly borne along. The two currents, meeting in the more open street he had just quitted, carried him forward in the midst of them, and finding it impossible to escape, he gave himself up for the time, and turning to a lad who was near, inquired what was the occasion which called so many persons together.

"Why, where do you come from, seigneur," said the young man, "that you don't know all this business?"

"I come from Italy," replied Bernard de Rohan, "where I have been with the army. But, once again, what is all this about?"

"Why I should have thought it might have reached there," replied the lad. "But don't you know they are bringing along Jamets, the great heretic printer, to burn him in the Place de Terreaux?"

"Indeed!" said Bernard de Rohan. "Pray what has he done to merit such a terrible punishment?"

"What has he done?" cried the young man, with a look of indignation. "He is a heretic; is not that enough? Don't they all mock the holy mass?—What has he done? I should not wonder if you were a heretic yourself."

"No, no, my good youth," replied Bernard de Rohan; "I certainly am not that. But they were not so strict about these matters a year or two ago, when I went with the army into Italy."

"There is much need they should be strict now," replied the boy, who as usual thought it manly to outdo the follies of his elders, "for the poisonous vermin have infected the whole place. Don't push so, Peter," he continued, speaking to one of those behind him, who was urging him forward exactly in the same manner that he was pressing on those before him.

"Get on! get on! or we shall not see the sight," cried the other. "They have taken him on through the lane."

In a few minutes the crowd began to issue forth into the Place de Terreaux; and before he could disengage himself, the terrible preparations for burning of one of the unfortunate victims of superstition were before the eyes of Bernard de Rohan. A space was railed off in the centre of the square, and kept clear by guards; but in the midst thereof, at the distance of about thirty yards from the young cavalier, appeared an elderly man, with a fine and intelligent countenance, pale as ashes, and evidently fully sensible of all the agonies of the death he was about to endure. He was chained upright to an enormous post or stake driven into the ground, and one of the brutal executioners was seen fastening the chain tighter round his neck, though another had, by this time, lighted the fagots which had been piled up underneath and around his feet. From time to time the victim closed his eyes, and his lips moved as if murmuring forth a prayer; at other moments, he cast a wild and fearful glance round upon the people; but in general he remained still and quiet, as if striving within himself to subdue the natural repugnance of the flesh to the endurance of pain and death.

Bernard de Rohan loved not such sights, nor such acts; and as in that open space the crowd was thinner around him, he was turning away once more to pursue his path homeward, when a capuchin friar approached the unfortunate man, and holding up a crucifix, seemed to exhort him to

abandon his faith. At that point, however, all the firmness which had supported him through imprisonment and trial came back, and waving his hand indignantly, he turned away his head with a gesture of disgust.

The capuchin raised both his arms towards the sky; and a roar of furious exultation burst from the people, as the flames, almost at the same moment, were seen to rise up round the unfortunate victim, and the convulsive gasp of agony distorted his countenance.

Bernard de Rohan forced his way on; but as he did so, some one touched his arm from behind, evidently intentionally, and looking in that direction, he beheld, to his great surprise, the countenance of Corse de Leon.

The Brigand gazed upon him for a moment, but without speaking, then turned his head away; and recollecting the warning which he had received not to notice him unless spoken to by him, Bernard de Rohan made his way out through the people, and reached the inn just as it was growing dark. He now found that his attendant had been as little successful as himself in the search for Isabel de Brienne; but the landlord informed him that a gentleman named the Chevalier Lenoir had been there to inquire for him; and Bernard de Rohan, trusting that Corse de Leon might possess some better means of information than himself concerning the course which Isabel had taken, waited impatiently for the Brigand's return.

CHAPTER XXII.

Bernard de Rohan waited for nearly an hour before the person whom he wished to see made his appearance. At length, however, the aubergiste entered; and—with a face of so much mystery and importance as almost to make the young gentleman believe that he was acquainted with the character and pursuits of the Brigand—he announced that the Chevalier Lenoir had called again to know if the Baron de Rohan had returned. In a minute or two after, Corse de Leon himself entered the room; and Bernard could not but feel some surprise at the manner in which the wild, bold, vehement rover of the mountain side conformed to the usages of society, and bent down his energies, if we may so say, to the customary trammels of an artificial mode of life.

He shook hands with Bernard de Rohan as an old friend, put down his hat upon the table by his side, remarked that the dust had soiled his plume, spoke of the heat of the past day, and with such empty nothings carried on the interview till the aubergiste had retired and closed the large oaken door behind him.

The moment he was gone, however, the Brigand said abruptly, "I came hither before, to lead you to the scene whither it seems you had gone without me. Is not that a lovely sport?" he continued, with a curling lip and a flashing eye—"is not that a lovely sport for keen sleek priests, after feasting in the refectory? Is not that a sweet amusement for these holy and gentle pastors to go to with the grease of their patties still sticking upon their lips? Pastors! why our pastors of the Alps would teach them better than that: they take the wool and use the milk, but they roast not the lambs of their flock, as the people of the plains do. By Heaven, it would do my soul good to make yon bloodthirsty capuchin eat the flesh he has cooked this night. They call us lawless brigands," he continued—"pray God that we may ever be lawless, so long as there are such laws as these. I came to show you this spectacle, for I once told you I would make you witness such things, but you had gone without me."

"I went not willingly," replied Bernard de Rohan. "I was caught in the crowd, and could not disentangle myself. I hate and abhor such sights, and think that these acts are disgraceful and ruinous to our religion. If anything could justify heresy, such persecution surely would do it."

"Think not, think not," cried Corse de Leon, eagerly—"think not that this is a crime of our religion alone or of any other. It is man, and man's infamous laws, and the foul vices of that strange compact which rogue has made with rogue, and villain with villain, and tyrant with tyrant, and fool with fool, in order that the cunning may have the best means of outwitting the strong—that the criminal may torture and destroy the innocent, and the virtuous be for ever the prey of the vicious. Catholic or Protestant, Heretic, Infidel, Turk—it is all the same: man is bound together, not by a league for mutual defence, but by a league for mutual destruction and corruption. Here you yourself have a friend and comrade, who fights by your side, and whom you trust. What is the first thing that he does? Betrays you—seeks to injure you in the darkest way—plots—contrives—cabals——"

"There is a day of reckoning coming," replied Bernard de Rohan.

"Ay, and it may come soon," answered Corse de Leon; "for that very man is now in Lyons."

Bernard de Rohan started up, and laid his hand upon his sword, which he had thrown down upon a chair beside him; but the Brigand went on, saying, "Not to-night, not to-night. Let it be in the open day; and it were better, too, before the whole court of France."

"I will not wait for that," replied Bernard de Rohan. "Where I find him, there will I punish him. But as you say, it must be in the open day. Yet I must not let him escape me; I will write to him this instant."

"The way of all others to make him escape you," replied Corse de Leon. "He might, on this occasion, refuse to meet you hand to hand—he might——"

"No," answered Bernard de Rohan, "no, he dare not. There is no French gentleman who dares to be a coward. To those whom he has wronged, he must make reparation, even though it were with life. Besides, this is not a man to turn away from the sword's point."

"I know not," answered Corse de Leon, "for I am not one of you; but methinks—though there is nothing upon all the earth now living that could make me turn aside from my path—there would be something very terrible to me in a wronged friend. However, this man may have an excuse you know not of, to refuse you that which you desire: he may say that the matter is before the King, which, as I learn, it is. Be persuaded: wait till to-morrow: then let him be narrowly watched: meet him alone, and when your sword is drawn upon him, then, as you say, he cannot well evade you."

"He shall not," answered Bernard de Rohan. "But still it is not him that I now seek, it is my own dear Isabel; and here, in this town of Lyons, I have lost all trace of her, though she must have been here last night."

"Perhaps not," replied the Brigand. "I have no certain tidings of her, any more than you have; but listen to what I do know. I reached this place in haste to-day; and during the morning, at the inn called the Dolphin, near the old church, by the river, I saw a man who had been with this Meyrand in Savoy, his guide, and assistant, and confidential knave. He knew me not, and indeed, perhaps, had never seen me, for I see many, but am seen by few. I made inquiries, however, and I found that this man had preceded his lord from Paris on business, it was said, of mighty moment. He

was preparing rooms for him, gaining intelligence, and, in fact, making all things ready for whatever knavery so skilful a master might have in hand. I inquired farther, and found that yesterday, shortly after the man's arrival, a lady and her train had paused for some moments at the same inn—that one of the servants had spoken to this serviceable villain, and that without descending from her litter, she had gone on, it was said towards Geneva. To-day I waited and watched for the arrival of your enemy, and the moment he did come, he was closeted with his knave. A minute after, the host was summoned, and much inquiry made for fresh horses to go towards Geneva. By this time, however, it was late: none but tired beasts could be found, and the journey was put off till daybreak to-morrow morning."

"We will travel the same road," said Bernard de Rohan—"we will travel the same road. But what can have induced Isabel to take the way to Geneva?"

"We know not that this lady was the same," replied Corse de Leon; "but supposing her to be so, forget not that she believes you to be dead. I have told you that the matter is before the King; and she may fear that, as this Count de Meyrand is a known intimate of a woman all too powerful in this land of France, some constraint may be laid upon her will, in order to make her give her hand to him."

"They shall find," replied Bernard de Rohan, "that there is one whose claim upon her hand is not so easily to be cast off; and even were I dead, I am full sure that to the last day of her existence she would look on one who could betray his friend with nothing but abhorrence and disgust."

"It may be so," replied the Brigand; "but you have yet one thing to learn. Your claim upon her hand is already disallowed. On that the King's decision has gone forth three days ago. An edict, which has just reached Lyons, was then registered in the parliament of Paris, rendering all clandestine marriages, past or future, null and void. This was aimed at you, depend upon it, for both the wily Italian and the artful Frenchman were then at the court of France."

Bernard de Rohan covered his eyes with his hands, and paused thoughtfully without reply. "All this," he said, at length, "all this shows, my friend, the absolute need there is of my being speedily in Paris. Wherever Isabel may turn her steps, she will soon hear that I am living, if I appear before the King; and in another point of view, also, my speedy appeal to Henry himself may do good. There is one whom you have mentioned who does certainly possess much

power—far too much for any subject in the realm; but yet I judge not of her so harshly as you perhaps may do. She has a noble spirit, and I think would not willingly do wrong. Besides all this, she is the trusted friend of one who loves me well—the Maréchal de Brissac; therefore I do believe that especially she would not wish to injure me. When I have seen her, she has always seemed to regard me highly; and I will own—although I must regret that any one should hold such authority in the land of France as often to overrule the King's wisest ministers—I do believe that, for her own personal advantage, she would in no degree seek what is unjust to another, or do that which might be dangerous to her country. I have no doubt that one of her first wishes is to promote, in every way, such plans as she considers just and wise; and although of course she may from time to time be biassed, like every other person, by blinding mists of prejudice or of self-interest, yet I do think that she is less so than any other being who ever yet filled a situation of splendid disgrace and ill-bought authority. I believe, then, that with her, as with the King, a few plain words of remonstrance and explanation will win that support which is alone needful to my just claims."

"Then go thither at once," said Corse de Leon, with a dissatisfied air. "If you will still trust to those whom you have not tried, go thither, and encounter whatever the consequence may be. Were I you, my conduct would be different."

"What would you do then?" asked Bernard de Rohan. "I do not propose to go to the court *at once*, but merely after I have done all that I can to trace my Isabel on the road that she has taken. Say! what would you do were you situated as I am?"

"It matters little," replied Corse de Leon—"for we are differently formed. You are like the stately war-horse, doubtless strong and full of fire, but broken down to the bit and rein of custom, and trained to pace hither and thither, as the great riding-master, called society, wills. Your affections may be vehement, your courage high, your heart sincere, but you are not fitted and formed for the wild life of freedom, or for a desperate and deadly struggle against the trammels of habit, and the lash and spur of opinion. I, on the contrary, am the lion—or, if you will, the tiger, or the wolf. No hand tames me and goads me on—my mouth knows no bit and curb; the desert is my home—solitude my society—my own will my law—and they who strive to take

and chain me, to break me down to the world's habits, or to bind me by man's opinions, will either rue the bite of the free wild beast, or see him die before the hunters, in silence and despair. If you would know what I would do, I would take my revenge of that bad man—I would seek the lady till I found her—I would tell her that dangers, obstructions, impediments, and the vain idleness of a world's laws were before us if we did not trample upon that world's judgments—I would ask her to cast off for me and with me the prejudices of country and connexions—I would make my native place of the first land of freedom I could find—I would find my friends and my relations amongst the brave, and the free, and the good, wherever I met them—I would press out from the grape of liberty the wine of my own happiness, and I would drink of the cup that my own hand had prepared. But such counsels are not for you; such things are not parts of your nature."

"I believe not," replied Bernard de Rohan; "but still the first part of your advice I shall follow, and at daybreak tomorrow will set out to meet this man upon the way, and bid him draw his sword where there is none to interrupt us."

"Should he refuse?" said the Brigand. "He is well accompanied—has many men with him, and some who seem to bear a high rank and station. He may refuse to draw his sword, and say that the matter is before the King—what then?"

"I will spurn him as a cur," replied Bernard de Rohan. "I will strike him in the midst of his people, call him coward as well as knave, and send him back with the brand of shame upon his brow. It matters not to me who are with him! If gentlemen be there, so much the better; Bernard de Rohan's name is not unknown, Bernard de Rohan's honour bears no stain; and they shall hear his treachery and baseness blazoned in the open day by a tongue unknown to falsehood."

Corse de Leon gazed upon him for a moment with a grave, perhaps one might call it a pitying smile. "You have forgotten," he said, "or never fully known the court of France. There has there risen up," he added, "within my memory, a habit—an affectation of indifference, if you like to call it so—to all things on this earth; which indifference is born of a corrupt and a degraded heart, and of sated and exhausted appetites. To a high mind, furnished with keen and vigorous faculties, nothing on earth can be indifferent; for acuteness of perception—a quality which, in its degree, assimilates us to the divine nature—weighs all distinctions. As God him-

self sees all the qualities of everything, whether minute or great, and gives them their due place, so the grander and the more expansive the intellect may be, the more accurately it feels, perceives, and estimates the good or evil of each individual thing. The low and the base, the palled taste of luxury, the satiated sense of licentiousness, the callous heart of selfishness, the blunted sensibilities of lust, covetousness, gluttony, effeminacy, and idleness, take refuge in indifference, and call it to their aid, lest vanity—the weakest but the last point to become hardened in the heart of man—should be wounded. They take for their protection the shield of a false and tinsel wit, the answer of a sneer, the argument of a supercilious look, and try to gloze over everything, to themselves and others, with a contemptuous persiflage which confounds all right and wrong. Thus will this Count and his companions meet you; and you will gain neither answer nor satisfaction, but a jest, a sneer, or a look of pity."

"It matters not," replied Bernard de Rohan, "it matters not! There are some things that men cannot laugh away! Honour, and courage, and virtue, are not columns planted so loosely that a light gale can blow them down; and I will mark his brow with such disgrace that an ocean of laughter and light jests will never wash the stain off again. When I have done that, I will seek my Isabel, and by her own wishes shall our future conduct be guided. You have reasoned like a learned scholar, my good friend; but yet you see you have not converted me to your thoughts, though I will own that it much surprises me to find you have such varied knowledge of courts, and, I should think, of schools also."

"I have of both," replied Corse de Leon: "the one I have seen, though in a humble sphere; the other, in my youth, I frequented, and gained there knowledge which those who taught me did not know that they communicated. However, I wished not to convince you or to overrule your determination, for that determination is not wrong. I only desired that you should go to its execution with a full knowledge of all that you might meet with. Follow your plan, therefore, as you have laid it down, and in executing it I will not be far from you in case of need. There is no knowing what a bad man may do, and you ride too slightly attended to offer much resistance in case they sought to do you wrong."

"Oh, I fear not, I fear not," replied Bernard de Rohan. "Here, on the soil of France, I have no fear of any acts of violence, such as that from which I suffered in Savoy."

"Have you not seen to-night," said his companion—"have

you not seen this night what wrongs are daily done, even here? However, as I have said, I will not be far from you; so for the present farewell, and let not daylight see you a lingerer in this dark city."

Thus saying, he turned, and left his young companion, who remained for some time plunged in deep thought; and though the light of bright hope continued still unextinguished before him, mists and clouds came across the flame from time to time, making it wavering, uncertain, and obscure.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The sky was still grey, when Bernard de Rohan, up and dressed, stood waiting in his own chamber till his horses, which seemed somewhat long in coming, were brought forth into the court of the inn. As he did so, he slowly and thoughtfully drew his sword from the scabbard, and pressing the point against the ground, bent the weapon nearly double. Then withdrawing his hand suddenly, he suffered it to spring back again, and the well-tempered blade became instantly as straight as it was before.

The young gentleman marked it with a smile, and putting the true friend in need back again into the scabbard, he walked down the stairs and spoke a few words to the host at the door, till his horse being at length led forward, he sprang into the saddle and rode out, as if taking the way to Geneva.

When he had gone about a mile, he met a peasant coming in on a gaily decorated mule, bringing supplies for the good city; and as the man gave him the good morning, the Baron asked whether there were any travellers on the road before him.

"Oh, ay," replied the man, "a fair party as you would wish to see, and a gallant gentleman at their head. Perchance you are looking for them?"

"It may be so," replied Bernard de Rohan. "How far are they in advance, my good friend?"

"Truly you must use whip and spur," replied the man, "for I passed them a good hour and a half ago, beyond Mirebel, and they were going at a mad rate."

Bernard de Rohan did apply the spur; and in a much less time than an hour and a half passed through the small hamlet of Mirebel, and under the old castle which then stood

upon the hill beyond. Inquiring at one of the cottages as he passed on, he again heard of the same party, but still found that they were far in advance of him; nor, by the accounts of the peasantry, did he seem to have gained upon them much, when he was once more obliged to pause in order to refresh his horse.

"It will be night before I overtake them," he thought; "but I will overtake them or die."

Such resolutions are always very, very vain, as indeed is every other resolution of human nature. Tossed as we are upon the sea of circumstances, and never knowing where the next wave may bear us, there is but one resolution which man can safely take, with even a probable hope of not breaking it—the resolution of doing right whatever may be the event. Then, even then, he must count with daring boldness upon the stability and the firmness of that most weak and wavering thing—his own heart.

Bernard de Rohan resolved to overtake them or to die; and with that resolution he rode on. At Mount Luel he heard of them again, and eagerly pursued his way, till towards the afternoon he arrived, with tired horses, at the small town of Pont d'Ain. He had heard of the party that he sought at every place where he had paused to inquire, even as far as the village of Varambon, which, as the reader well knows, is scarcely a mile and a half from the pleasant little town of Pont d'Ain. In the latter place, at that time, though it was directly on the way, as the road then lay, from Paris to Chambery, and a castle belonging to the Duke of Savoy stood upon the heights, seeming to claim it as a part of his dominions—at that time there was but one inn in the place which afforded accommodation for man and horse. There were two or three houses, indeed, of the kind called *Repues*, where travellers on foot were entertained; but to the other house, or the Gite, as it was called, Bernard de Rohan directed his steps, and immediately on dismounting, inquired for the party of horsemen which had preceded him.

"The gentleman and his servant," replied the hostess, who was the person to whom he addressed himself,—"the gentleman and his servant, who came about two hours and a half ago, have both gone out, and are to return by supper-time; but there has no other party, sir, either stopped here or passed through Pont d'Ain to-day."

Such tidings were not to be believed by Bernard de Rohan; and although he had passed through Pont d'Ain more than once before, and had every reason to believe that there was

no other inn in the place, he now imagined that in this respect he must be mistaken; and saying that he also would return to supper, he set out to inquire at every other house of public entertainment in the town, whether the person whom he sought for had as yet arrived.

The purposes with which he went were certainly of a fierce and stern kind: he felt that he had been deeply and bitterly wronged, and he went to punish him who had done it; but as he walked on there was a calm sweetness in the air, somewhat tempered from the heat of noon, which in a degree soothed him, and caused a feeling of sorrow at being forced to perform so bloody a task, to mingle with the other sensations in his bosom.

He inquired at more than one place whether there was any other inn than that at which he had stopped; but found that there was none where the party which he sought could have paused for the night. At every other auberge, also, the same story was told him, that no persons had passed through the town that day, nor had any party of consequence entered the town except the cavalier and his servant, who had put up at the great inn, and who it appeared had been seen by every one. One old woman, to whom he applied, began to enlarge upon the grace and beauty of the cavalier; and Bernard de Rohan, thinking that Adrian de Meyrand might possibly have left some of his attendants behind on the road, or sent them in some other direction, began to question her as to whether she had remarked which way the gentleman took when he left the inn, and could point it out to him.

"Doubtless I can, sir," she said in reply. "He seemed to saunter forth quite idly, and looked about the town. Then he walked up towards the castle, and then cast his eyes up the river, and came down again, and crossed the bridge, and I saw him go slowly up gazing upon the water as if wondering at its clearness."

"That is not like Adrian de Meyrand," thought Bernard de Rohan, as the woman spoke. "He has no such tastes as that: nevertheless, I will make myself sure;" and following the way that the good lady pointed out to him, he too crossed the old bridge, and walked quickly on at the side of the Ain by a path which skirted the river, and along which the high road is now carried. He pursued this path for nearly two miles before he perceived any human being, except here and there, in the fields around, some of the peasantry gathering in the abundant gifts of nature, or boys and

girls scaring the birds from the vines. At length, however, the young cavalier perceived another gentleman sitting in a picturesque situation on a bank overhanging the stream, and gazing down upon the water. He was amusing himself by pitching off pebbles from the bank with the point of his sword scabbard, while his hat and plume lay beside him, and his long dark hair fluttered in the summer breeze.

The stranger was evidently not Adrian de Meyrand, but yet the form was familiar to Bernard de Rohan. He could not see the face, indeed; but the figure, the attitude, the employment, each instantly served to awaken remembrances of other days, and to tell him that there before him sat Henry de Brienne, the brother of his own dear Isabel. The young gentleman did not perceive that any one approached; and the path which his friend followed passing over the bank behind, Bernard de Rohan came within a step of him without rousing him from his reverie. The attitude and countenance of Henry de Brienne were both melancholy, and Bernard de Rohan heard him sigh deeply.

"Henry," said the young soldier, laying his hand on his arm—"Henry, this is a strange meeting."

Henry of Brienne started up, and drawing a step back, gazed upon Bernard de Rohan with an inquiring and bewildered look. "Mortbleu!" he exclaimed at length, grasping his companion's hand; "here is the dead alive again! Why, Bernard, 'tis but this morning I heard of your death. Intelligence the most certain was brought of your being crushed under one of the towers of the castle of Masseran; and you have no earthly right to be alive."

"Has that story travelled even hither?" said the young cavalier. "Rumour has certainly quicker wings than the wind, for that false tale to have reached even the Pont d'Ain in four or five days."

"Nay, it was in Lyons that I heard it," replied Henry de Brienne, "and there dame Rumour appeared on a horse's back, and clothed in the dress of a courier of the Lord of Masseran's."

"Were you, then, in Lyons this morning?" demanded Bernard de Rohan, eagerly.

"In truth was I," his companion answered; "even at the inn called the Dolphin, Bernard; and had you but sought for me there, you would have found me with more than one old friend of yours."

"With Adrian de Meyrand?" replied Bernard de Rohan. "Where is he now, Henry? He it is I am now seeking. Did he come with you hither?"

"Not only Meyrand," replied the young Count, without directly answering his friend's question—"not only Meyrand, but the Lord of Masseran also would you have found, had you but visited the Dolphin. But come, let us return to the inn, and, like statesmen and lawyers, discuss all things over our supper;" and thus saying, he drew his friend back in the direction of the town.

"But where is the Count de Meyrand?" again demanded Bernard de Rohan. "Henry, he has basely wronged me; and if he be anywhere within reach I must find him, and make him give me reason for what he has done."

"He is far away by this time," replied the other, in a careless tone, that did not much please his companion. "Why, Bernard, he is at Moulins ere now, and will be in Paris before you can reach him."

"Then he came not on with you hither?" demanded Bernard de Rohan, seeing that the prey had escaped from him. "This is unfortunate."

"No, he returned to Paris as quick as he came," replied Henry of Brienne. "It was my good lord and stepfather who came hither with me; but if you would know, dear friend, how it all fell out, you shall hear the tale;" and he proceeded to give Bernard de Rohan as clear an account as his own knowledge would afford, of all that had taken place in Paris affecting the marriage of his friend and his sister.

Bernard de Rohan listened in silence, with busy but bitter thoughts chasing each other through his brain, while Henry proceeded. "I set out alone," continued Henry de Brienne, after having detailed the announcement of the edict—"I set out alone, and, to say sooth, I did not much covet the good Lord of Masseran as a travelling companion. I had scarcely reached the third post, however, when I was overtaken by my amiable stepfather and the Count de Meyrand: the Lord of Masseran being bound by the King's commands to set you instantly free; and the good Count, I have a notion, being very desirous of helping me to seek for Isabel. When, however, we heard this morning at Lyons, by a courier from Savoy, that you were buried under the ruins of one of the towers, the Count sped back again to Paris, to make his claim to the hand of Isabel good before the King, while the Lord of Masseran did me the honour of accompanying me almost to the gates of the Pont d'Ain. I was very anxious to get rid of him; but I knew it might be difficult to do so straightforwardly, and, therefore, by a word spoken now and then, during our morning's ride, I just let

him understand that the King of France was very likely to visit your death upon his head somewhat severely, if he did not seek that gracious monarch at once, and tell his own story first. I insinuated this fact more than asserted it, and he consequently became so strongly possessed with that idea, that he quitted me where the road turns off, leaving me to pursue my search alone. Here, however, we are, once more upon the bridge, and I trust that supper is ready, for I am an hungered."

"Have you any clue," demanded Bernard de Rohan, "to guide you in your search for Isabel? She, too, it seems, is persuaded that I am dead, and I long to find and comfort her."

"I have no certain clue whatever," replied Henry de Brienne, in an indifferent tone. "She escaped from the charge of Meyrand, it would seem, somewhere about Bourgoin, and he, suspecting that Masseran had taken her, followed with all speed to Paris. As soon as he found his mistake, however, he sent off a servant to watch for her at Lyons, and gain what intelligence he could of the course she pursued. From this man we learned last night that a lady had paused at that inn, whom, from a slight glance he obtained of her face in the close litter that bore her, he could have sworn was Isabel herself; but she stayed not for more than a few minutes, and then took the road onwards towards Geneva. What should lead her to Geneva I cannot conceive; and, moreover, the fellow represents her as being accompanied by an almoner, and a large train, which how poor Isabel should get I cannot divine. However, as this was the only trace of her to be found, I felt myself bound to follow it, and here I am upon that course without any great tidings to guide me farther. If one may believe the people at the inn here, there were at least fifty ladies and fifty large trains, and fifty almoners, passed through the Pont d'Ain yesterday; but at all events I shall gain intelligence at the frontier, for they would not allow a number of men to pass without inquiry."

Bernard de Rohan heard him in silence, pondering upon all the intelligence which had been given him. He now, for the first time, knew all that had taken place, and he felt that his situation was one of no slight difficulty. The ear of the King had evidently been gained by persons whom he had but too just a cause to regard as his enemies. Though neither he nor Isabel was distinctly mentioned by the edict of the King, his marriage had been formally annulled; and

it became a question whether he should immediately proceed to Paris and endeavour to remove any prejudices created against him, leaving Henry of Brienne to seek for his sister and bring her to the court, or whether he should pursue the search for Isabel herself, and accompanying her to the capital, lay claim to the hand which he still looked upon as plighted to him by ties that the will of no king upon earth could ever dissolve.

It may be asked, whether the suggestion which had been made to him by Corse de Leon, of carrying her he loved to some foreign land, did not occur to his mind, and whether he did not feel tempted in some degree to follow it. It certainly did present itself to his recollection. It was, however, but as an image of what might be a last resource. He knew that the church would hold his marriage to be good, whatever a retrospective law might say against it; and he did think that, under some circumstances, he might fly with Isabel to another land, and pass the rest of his days in voluntary exile, content with an inferior station, and happy in an union with her he loved. The picture, even, was a pleasant one to look upon; for in contemplating sacrifices that we propose to make for the attainment of any great object, imagination is ever a kind friend to self-devotion, painting the consequences of our acts all bright, and concealing all the darker points of the future in a blaze of light. We see not, we calculate not upon a multitude of minor miseries; neither do we take into consideration the remoter evils; it is the greater and the nearer pains and perils that we look to, and we find strength in the determination of our own hearts to vanquish these. But at the same time we do not remember that the strong cause, the motive which gave such vigorous impulse to all our actions, as to carry us through the first and more prominent obstacles, gradually loses its own power and activity, till at length the very memory of our first sensations dies away, and we are left to endure all the remote consequences without the sustaining power that bore us forward at first. The cannon ball that tore its way through strong walls without a perceptible diminution of its speed, in the end of its course creeps slowly along the ground, and at length a child's hand may stop it as a plaything. Thus, in general, are the strong resolutions of encountering all evils for the attainment of one great purpose. They carry us forward impetuously through the first obstacles, but fail of themselves at length, and are overcome by petty impediments. No man, however, believes it will be

so in his own case; for no one either sees all those petty impediments, or believes that the vigour of his resolution will ever fail.

To Bernard de Rohan the thought of so flying with Isabel, and seeking fame and fortune in another land, offered a pleasant picture to his eye, but merely as a thing that might have been, had France then been groaning under a despotic tyrant, or which still might be, were any act of absolute injustice exercised against himself. Such, however, was not yet the case. The monarch was one very generally loved and esteemed, not perhaps a very great and politic sovereign, nor in any respect a man of resplendent genius, but still of an amiable and a kindly heart, of a noble and a chivalrous spirit, humane, and generous, and placable.

He paused not then upon the suggestion of Corse de Leon as a plan applicable to the moment; but when he came to ask himself the question, which of the other two courses he should pursue, whether he should hasten on to the court alone, or accompany Henry of Brienne upon his search, the latter was soon chosen. "I should be wronging my own claims," he thought, "not to maintain to the last my right to Isabel's hand as her husband. The consent of her father having been given, and given in her mother's presence, without the slightest opposition, must surely render this marriage a case not to be affected by the King's edict. I should be injuring her, then, I should be injuring myself, if I did not maintain my right by every means in my power; and hand in hand with her, I will go to the foot of the throne, and require Henry's confirmation of our union."

There were other considerations, also, which led him towards the same course. There was in the manner of Henry of Brienne a certain sort of thoughtful abstractedness which was not natural to him. There was a reserve, a want of the open-hearted and somewhat careless frankness of demeanour which usually characterized him—a something, in short, which showed a difference between his affections at that time and his feelings in the years gone by. It was not that he was cold, or unkind, or unfriendly; but there was a shade upon him, a restraint, which made Bernard de Rohan but the more anxious to see Isabel himself, and accompany her to the court. His conduct, therefore, was easily determined; but as his young companion continued thoughtful, and seemed little inclined to speak, Bernard de Rohan resolved to wait till the next morning, ere he discussed with Isabel's brother the future plans they were to pursue.

They were near the inn, indeed, before Henry de Brienne's tale was concluded; and once arrived there, supper had to be served, servants and chamberlains were coming and going, and no opportunity for private conversation presented itself. The hours went by, the sun went down, and Henry yawned, declaring that he was fatigued with his long journey.

Bernard de Rohan marked his conduct with some surprise, but agreed to his proposal of retiring to rest; and though he himself, anxious to depart early on the following day, lost no time in seeking his pillow, he heard with wonder and with pain the steps of Henry de Brienne, in the adjoining chamber, walking up and down for more than an hour, and giving a direct contradiction to his pretence of fatigue.

"All is not right," thought Bernard de Rohan—"all is not right; and I must learn, as soon as possible, what is the matter here."

The lover was early up, as usual; but Henry de Brienne did not appear for some time, and Bernard de Rohan sent a servant to his room to waken him.

"He would come to breakfast soon," was the reply the servant brought; but another hour went by and he did not come; and when his friend went up himself to hasten him, he found him but half dressed.

Bernard de Rohan urged him to more speed, somewhat impatiently; but the young gentleman seemed surprised, and heard his friend announce his determination of accompanying him in the search for Isabel with a look expressive of anything but satisfaction. Bernard de Rohan had to remember that it was Isabel's brother, and to put a guard upon his lips, lest any sharp or unkind word should escape him. Believing, upon reflection, that either the Lord of Masseran, or the Count de Meyrand, might have been labouring to shake Henry de Brienne's regard for him, he turned the subject during their breakfast to the conduct of both those persons, and displayed fully and fairly the proceedings of each. Henry de Brienne heard him almost in silence, and only observed, "Oh, everything is fair in love and war, you know, Bernard."

"And in friendship, too?" demanded Bernard de Rohan, gravely. "If so, Henry, neither love nor friendship will bring happiness, nor war glory. A man of honour will pursue each honourably, or not at all. He who wins by other means loses more, surely, than he gains. But here are the horses, friend; let us not waste more time, I do beseech you."

Thus saying, he hastened out and sprang upon his horse.

Henry de Brienne followed more slowly, and lost many a precious minute in inquiries and orders about nothing; mounting at length, he rode on in silence beside his friend. There was restraint on both sides; and Bernard de Rohan even thought that he perceived a degree of irritability in Henry's manner which was unpleasant to him; and yet the mood was strange, too; for when Bernard strove to vanquish his restraint, and to remove the strange humour which had fallen upon him; when for that purpose he tried to lure his mind back to other years, and through the memories connected therewith, to awaken the feelings and affections of those days; when he spoke of his early love for Isabel, and her love for him, and of all the things in the gone, by means of which association was likely to renew a better spirit, Henry smiled with a melancholy air, and casting down his eyes, thoughtfully murmured, "Those were happy days."

As soon, however, as the momentary effect had passed away, he fell into the same mood, and in conversation either displayed a quick and waspish impatience, or rambled wildly and idly over a thousand irrelevant subjects, ever keeping aloof from any mention of his sister, and her union with Bernard de Rohan.

At the small town of Cerdon, near which the traveller first begins to climb the mountains of the Jura, the two gentlemen stopped to make inquiries, hoping there to obtain some more accurate information regarding the course of Isabel than they had met with at Pont d'Ain. Here, however, no trace of her was to be found. If, at their former resting-place, they had been confused by a multitude of accounts, here none was to be obtained at all. The simple fact met them in reply to every inquiry, that no lady with any train, great or small, had passed by or through Cerdon during the several preceding days. This assurance was given, and repeated again and again, and how the search was to be pursued now became the question. At length, it was determined to send out messengers in various directions, to the towns and villages round about, between Cerdon and the Pont d'Ain, to discover at what point Isabel had quitted the road to Geneva; and not contented with trusting to others, Bernard de Rohan, after a short pause, declared that he would set forth himself, and trace back the way for some distance towards Lyons, inquiring at every village near which a cross road turned off.

Henry de Brienne endeavoured to dissuade him from going, and then drew from him a hasty promise not to pursue the

search, if he gained certain intelligence, without coming or sending for him.

"I must stay here," he said, "myself, unless I gain some clear information, as my good Lord of Masseran has promised to send me news of his reception at the court without a moment's loss of time. He travels post, and such tidings may soon come."

Bernard de Rohan paused not for farther inquiry, but went on his way, and during the whole of the rest of that day pursued the search, but in vain. On his return to the inn at Cerdon that night, he found that Henry de Brienne had set off, not long after himself, for Nantua, leaving a message that he would be back as soon as he could.

He learned also that two of the messengers which had been sent out had returned, bringing no tidings; but a third arrived, towards eleven at night, with better success, having heard, at the town of Bourg, that a lady had passed in that direction, bearing so completely the description of Isabel, that Bernard could not doubt her route was once more discovered.

"The people at the inn of Bourg," the man said, "declared she had taken her way towards Macon, and was travelling but slowly;" and the lover's heart beat eagerly to follow her at once, had he not been prevented by his promise to her brother. He looked anxiously, then, for Henry's return; but midnight passed, and it became no longer doubtful that he would remain at Nantua that night.

Bernard de Rohan took the precaution, however, to order a messenger to proceed at an early hour to Nantua, bearing intelligence to Henry de Brienne that the course his sister had taken had been discovered; but when he himself rose early the next morning his friend had not made his appearance, and several more hours passed, by the young cavalier, in somewhat angry impatience. At length, when, as far as he could calculate, full time and more than time had been given for Henry de Brienne to return from Nantua, he ordered out his horse, resolved to wait no longer, and was in the very act of mounting to depart, when the messenger he had sent rode up to the inn door, telling him that Isabel's brother had set off by the cross road which led from Nantua direct towards Bourg, and begged him to join him at the village of Leissard.

Bernard de Rohan certainly felt somewhat indignant; but, followed by his servant, he put spurs to his horse in order

to overtake his friend; and though, on account of the rivers and streams which intersect that part of the country, he had some difficulty in making his way, he yet arrived at Leissard in time to meet Henry de Brienne at the door of a little cabaret in the village. He could not refrain from giving some way to the feelings of anger which his friend's conduct had occasioned; and though he spoke gently, he certainly spoke reproachfully.

Henry answered in a hot and fiery mood; and the old lady of the inn, who was handing up a glass of the good wine of Bresse to the young gentleman, exclaimed, "Oh, don't quarrel, noble sirs, don't quarrel. It were a pity to see two such gentlemen anything but friends."

"Be not afraid, my good lady," replied Bernard de Rohan; "there is no fear of our quarrelling."

"On my life, I do not know that," replied Henry de Brienne; and without more ado, he put a piece of money in the hostess's hand and spurred on. It was then that Bernard de Rohan first perceived that his friend was quite alone, having no longer even the servant with him who accompanied him from the Pont d'Ain to Cerdon, and riding fast after him, he asked him where was his groom, more for the purpose of beginning a new subject than anything else.

"I have left him to wait for Masseran's courier," replied the young Count, in a surly tone. "But I see not what you have to do with that."

"Nay, nay, Henry," replied his friend, "do not make a quarrel out of nothing! In what I said just now I merely wished to point out that, when two people are pursuing a search of this kind together, they must act upon some arranged plan."

"I really do not see," said Henry de Brienne, turning his head towards him sharply, but still riding on, "why we should pursue this search together at all. I do not want your company in it; and, in fact, would a great deal rather be without it. I am seeking my sister, in order that she may be placed under the King's protection as well as mine, and on such a search I would rather proceed alone."

Bernard de Rohan remonstrated in vain, and then using a higher tone, explained to him briefly his views and purposes, which were the views and purposes of an honourable and upright man.

"I have nothing to do with all that," replied Henry de Brienne. "I have merely to say that I don't choose to be

followed and tutored, guided and directed, by you. The matter has gone far enough."

"Too far, Henry!" replied Bernard de Rohan, with his cheek very red. "Be assured, however, that whatever you say or do will make no difference to me. I shall pursue my search for Isabel, having myself obtained information of where she is, without scruple and without hesitation, whether it pleases you or not."

"Then you shall certainly pursue your search by yourself," answered Henry de Brienne, with an angry gesture; "for you shall not accompany me. I am in no mood to be trifled with," and his left hand rested upon the hilt of his sword.

"Nay, nay, Henry," replied Bernard de Rohan, with a sorrowful smile, "this is really too much. You will do as you please; I shall simply pursue the straightforward path before me towards Macon. I shall endeavour, and I trust with success, to find your sister, and shall convey her immediately to the court of the King, with all the tenderness, affection, care, and delicacy of a brother. Now, as I said before, you will act as you please; I go on my way, and say not one word more upon the subject."

"I will take care you shall not say one word more to me," replied Henry de Brienne. "But yet the matter ends not here; we shall meet again ere long. If you follow that path, I follow this." So saying, he turned at once into a road, the entrance of which they had been approaching, and which led into a deep wood, extending down to the very banks of the Ain. He took no farther leave, nor looked behind him, but galloped on at full speed, leaving his companion gazing after him in anger, surprise, and grief.

After pausing for a moment, Bernard turned towards the servant, who had drawn up his horse a step behind, and who, having heard angry words, and marked angry gestures, between his master and one whom he knew to be the friend of his earliest years, seemed scarcely less surprised than the young cavalier himself. All that had taken place was so unexpected, so strange, so unaccountable, that Bernard de Rohan felt confused and bewildered, and remained a moment without speaking. "Good Heaven!" he said to himself, at length; "is old affection to be treated thus?" and then, raising his voice, he added to the man, "Wait here till I come back."

At the same moment he put spurs to his horse, and rode after Henry de Brienne at full speed, resolved to endeavour

once more to soothe and reason with him, and do much rather than suffer him to depart in such a frame of mind. Happy had it been for him, happy for all concerned, had he refrained. He did not again make his appearance for three quarters of an hour, or perhaps more, and the servant, alarmed by all he had witnessed, rode some short way into the wood. There, however, he met his master returning. Bernard de Rohan was on foot, leading his horse, his countenance pale and somewhat haggard, his handkerchief bound round his hand, and some drops of blood upon his sleeve and collar. As soon as he saw the servant, he sprang upon his horse again, rode on without speaking, and once more resumed the high road.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The court was still at Fontainbleau; and Isabel de Brienne sat in a lonely chamber of the château, gazing forth, with a fair and an animated scene before her eyes, but without taking any note of the calm face of nature, or of the many moving objects that flitted across the view. Those eyes, indeed, were dimmed with tears, which, though several days had now elapsed since the heavy grief that weighed her down had fallen upon her heart, had not ceased to flow from time to time when she thought of him who was gone, and called up the memories of the past. Let us love as we may, let us enjoy the society of those to whom our heart is given as much as it is possible, there will be still—from the touch of earth in all our affections—something which renders the memory of love, when fate has severed the tie, more sweet, more intense, than even while its mortal course was running. Perhaps it is, that—as when we are removed at some distance from beautiful things we see them better than when we are in the midst of them—perhaps it is, that when the moments of enjoyment are passed, we feel them collectively, rather than separately, and that the whole of our happiness, when gone, gathered together by recollection, is more powerfully and duly estimated than when scattered over the pathway of many hours.

Be it what it may, it seemed to Isabel de Brienne that her love for Bernard de Rohan had increased rather than diminished by his death; that the happiness which she had enjoyed in his society was greater than she had imagined it to

be; that the necessity of that society to her heart was more absolutely imperative than she had believed it; that to her there was nothing that could supply its place; that without it, life was more arid than a desert.

She sat and wept then, but silently and quietly; for although the cause of her tears still continued, that which first occasioned them to flow was in the past. No new bitterness had been added to her situation by anything which took place around her. Every one was kind to her, every one seemed to compassionate her. The King himself had seen her more than once, and had spoken to her with all tenderness. His daughter, the Princess Claude, had devoted herself to soothe her. Even Catherine de Medicis, who, notwithstanding her strong courage and masculine mind, had a touch of every human passion in her nature, the softer as well as the fiercer, had used her gently and kindly, and had done all that she could to prevent anything from being importunate to her in her affliction. She had never been called upon to appear at the court. She had been left undisturbed in that solitude which could alone calm her grief; and if anything was said or done to win her from her sorrow, it was quietly and delicately; for there was something in her very manner and tone which impressed all those around her with the certainty, that she did not either exaggerate the grief that she felt, or encourage it to endure longer than its appointed time.

On the present occasion, however, she had not sat long alone, for the Princess Claude had not left her more than half an hour when she received a summons to the presence of the King, and descending to the story of the castle immediately below that which she inhabited, she found Henry himself, with the Dauphin, his young daughter Marguerite, and one or two others of the highest personages attached to the court. The moment she entered, Henry advanced to meet her, and taking her by the hand, said in a low and gentle voice, "I have sent for you, fair lady, because I think that the time is come when you must make an effort to shake off this grief, and in some degree to mingle with the world again."

"Sire," replied she, in a quiet but firm tone, "I have no wish ever to mingle with the world again. The purpose which I mentioned to your majesty of retiring into a convent as speedily as possible remains not only unshaken, but, on the contrary, confirmed by thought and calm reflection. Last night I had a letter from my mother, fully approving of my intention; and this morning I had an interview of some

length with my Lord of Masseran, who rather confirms than opposes my purpose. He told me that his stay was prolonged here by order of your majesty; and I was not without hopes that it was for the purpose of making such arrangements as might be requisite for my permanent retirement from the world."

"No, no," replied the King, "my views in detaining him were far different. I cannot abandon the hope that your feelings in these respects will change; and I must require of you to remain some time longer here, and to make an effort to mingle in the more tranquil society of this place."

"Oh, sire," exclaimed Isabel, "do not, do not force me so to do."

"Nay," said the King, gravely, "I must exact it of you. From the larger assemblies of the court, you shall be exempt; but on ordinary occasions I must request that you will be present. I have now some important business to transact, but I beg you to remain here till my return."

Thus saying, the King departed, and Isabel remained standing where he had left her. She felt that she must obey; but at that moment, though accustomed to courts, though full of grace, and possessing, in general, that calm tranquillity of mind which enables one, in all ordinary circumstances, to act with dignity and calmness, she could willingly have sunk into the earth at once to avoid the aggravation of all she felt by the number of human eyes upon her. It endured but for a moment, however; for the Dauphin immediately advanced to her side, saying, "Let me lead you to a seat, fair lady. Here is one beside my sister Marguerite;" and as he led her on, he added, in a lower voice, "Be comforted, be comforted. Perchance things may not be so bad as they seem."

Isabel shook her head with a melancholy look. "He knows not the history," she said to herself; but somewhat re-assured by his kindness, she suffered him to lead her on, and took the seat by the Princess, who greeted her with a kindly smile. For some minutes, of course, she continued an object of attention, and it was easy for her to perceive that her history and her situation gave a topic to many persons there present. Gradually, however, the subject lost its interest with its newness. People came and went. Several of the royal family spoke to her with kindness and attention. Marguerite, with those kindly feelings which she never lost, even with the loss of other good qualities, applied herself with more skill than so young a person might have been supposed

to possess, to occupy her fair companion's thoughts; and Isabel was becoming somewhat reconciled to the scene, when a person entered, the sight of whom once more threw her into distress and agitation.

That person was the Count de Meyrand, and after speaking to the higher personages in the room, he advanced directly towards her. The sight of the Count, as we have said, agitated and distressed her; but it was not the sight alone that gave her the greatest pain. His appearance in that saloon, and in the private circle of the royal family, was enough to show her at once, both that he had not ceased his pursuit, and that he followed it with the approbation and countenance of the King. Such a conviction was indeed terrible to her, and drove her almost to despair.

Little did the Count de Meyrand know the sensations which at that moment were busy in her bosom, the feelings of abhorrence and disgust with which his whole conduct had inspired her; the determination which instantly seized her to lose no time in throwing herself at the King's feet, and beseeching him to spare her the misery of any farther suit from one she so thoroughly detested and despised. The Count's demeanour, however, was very different from that which she expected; and certainly, had it been possible for Isabel to be deceived in regard to his past conduct, or to feel towards him any other sensation but that of dislike and reprobation, his behaviour on the present occasion might have made some way to regain her esteem.

He approached her, then, with a grave and even melancholy aspect; and bowing first to the Princess Marguerite, he then turned to Isabel, and said, in a tone not exactly low and private, but still somewhat beneath that of the ordinary conversation that was going on, "I grieve to see you looking ill in health as well as at heart, Mademoiselle de Brienne. But I can assure you that I share your sorrow for one who—nay, do not make so impatient a gesture: I beseech you remember that we were friends before we were rivals, and that such old feelings are not easily shaken off."

Isabel's eyes filled with tears, but she remained silent, and mastered them, though at the same time Marguerite, perhaps acting by directions she had previously received, made room for the Count to stand between herself and Isabel, and turning away her head, talked to her little brother Henry.

The Count did not lose the opportunity, and endeavoured, for more than an hour, to draw Isabel into conversation. He found the effort vain, however: she remained silent and

reserved; the very presence of one bitterly connected by memory with the death of him she loved being in itself sufficient to take from her all power and inclination to converse. When forced to answer, she did so shortly, generally by a monosyllable; and if, as was twice the case, the Count approached the subject, which was certainly uppermost in the thoughts of both, she replied in terms which made him leave it again instantly.

At length the King himself returned, and if one might judge by his countenance, the business which he had been transacting was of no very pleasant nature; his brow was heavy and contracted, and his cheek a little flushed; but such signs of anger were already dying away when he entered, and were soon mastered entirely. Amongst the first he spoke to was the Count de Meyrand, and he did so familiarly, though with a grave air. He was accompanied by the Maréchal de Vieilleville, who, while the monarch was thus noticing Monsieur de Meyrand, addressed a few words to Isabel in a kindly tone, and glanced his eye, but certainly with no very friendly expression, towards the Count.

The thought at that moment struck Isabel of engaging Monsieur de Vieilleville to assist her in her views. He had shown himself extremely kind towards her since her arrival; and his daughter, who was in attendance upon the Princess Claude, had been her greatest comfort. She resolved, then, to speak to him at once, and the opportunity was favourable. No eyes were at that moment upon them; the King was speaking to the Count de Meyrand, and his right shoulder turned towards her; and instead of replying to the courteous inquiries of the Maréchal, she said, "Oh, Monsieur de Vieilleville, I beseech you to obtain for me an audience of the King as speedily as may be, and if you would be yourself present also, to give me your support with his majesty, I should feel some hope; for, in truth,"—and she turned her eyes for an instant towards the Count de Meyrand—"for, in truth, if this is to continue, my heart will break."

"I fear it cannot be before to-morrow morning," replied Vieilleville, "for his majesty is almost immediately going out to ride, and there is more than sufficient business for this evening already accumulated."

"Then let it be as early as possible," said Isabel, "and oh, give me your voice and assistance, Monsieur de Vieilleville, I beseech you."

The Maréchal could not reply, for at that moment the King turned towards them, saying to the Count de Meyrand,

in conclusion, "Be here, at all events, Monsieur de Meyrand, towards mid-day to-morrow, as I think I may have something of importance to say to you."

The Count bowed low, and promised to obey; and Henry, addressing Isabel with that courteous hypocrisy, which may be an evil, but is a pleasant one, thanked her for having kindly stayed and mingled with his court, although he knew well that the fair unhappy girl had no choice but to yield to the commands she had received. The King, indeed, meant it kindly, and she felt that it was so; but the heart, under the effect of deep grief, is like a fine strung instrument, from which the lightest touch brings forth a sound, and a careless hand often, in seeking to awake more cheerful notes, strikes accidentally upon some inharmonious tone, which turns the whole to discord.

Henry saw the bright drops swimming between the dark lashes, but knowing that a word more might make them overflow, he left her to speak to some one else, and shortly afterwards the party separated.

Isabel retired to her own chamber, and for an hour or two afterwards was left to repose. She saw from the windows, at which she placed herself, the gay cavalcade of Henry and his courtiers ride away into the forest. She perceived many a group moving hither and thither. She heard the sound of horns, and the cry of dogs, and, in her loneliness, it seemed to her that all human things became more and more distasteful to her every moment.

It was at that unpropitious time that the tapestry over the door was pushed back, and equally to her surprise and indignation, she beheld the Count de Meyrand. She gazed at him in silence for a moment as he came in, dropped the tapestry, and advanced towards her. But although it was clear he saw how distasteful his visit was, he neither hesitated nor apologized, but proceeding without pause to the place where she sat, he bent his knee to the ground, with an air of deep grief and anxiety, saying, "I come alone, Mademoiselle de Brienne, to beseech your pardon for all that I have done amiss, to entreat you to forgive all the pain I have caused you, to acknowledge that I have been wrong—very wrong, in many things that I have done."

"Such acknowledgments, sir," replied Isabel, in a cold tone, "may be a relief to your own heart, but I neither require nor wish for them. As to forgiveness, I do forgive you from my soul, as I do everybody else who has acted the part of a bitter enemy towards me."

"Oh, call me not so! call me not so!" he exclaimed, vehemently—"call me not an enemy, when I have been actuated throughout by the deepest, the strongest, the most passionate love! Oh, Isabel, if you could tell what I have suffered; if, in the cold composure of your own well-regulated feelings, you could conceive what ardent and intense passion is; if, in short, you knew love, as love appears when he masters a strong human heart, you would comprehend, you would find excuses for the madness, if I may so call it, of my late conduct, you would conceive how and why I was driven to use every means in order to obtain the hand of her I loved. You would comprehend it, I say, you would find excuses for it, you would pardon, you would pity it. Nay, do not rise, lady—how have I offended now?"

"By mentioning, sir," replied Isabel, "love that can never be returned, on which I have again and again besought you not to speak, which is an insult to the widowed affections of my heart—love which has not produced the fruits of love, but has borne a bitterer harvest than the darkest enmity could have produced. I must insist that you leave me, or I will call for those who, in this place at least, are ready to insure me protection."

"Nay," said the Count, detaining her gently by the hand, "I beseech you remain, I myself will go in one moment. It was not my purpose, when I came here, to speak to you of that love: your words call forth, whether I would or not, those feelings which I would fain have kept imprisoned in my heart. I will not offend again. I came to assure you that my conduct shall be changed, that I am bitterly grieved for the past, and that I will give you no farther occasion whatsoever to view me in any other light than that of a sincere friend, if you will grant me forgiveness, and prove the sincerity of that forgiveness, by laying aside the cold and repulsive demeanour which you displayed towards me a few hours ago, by suffering me to approach you even as a common acquaintance, by permitting me to hear the tones of your voice, sometimes to win a smile from your lips, and by granting that I be no longer to be excluded from that happiness which is afforded to every one who knows you, on account of the deep, intense, and unchangeable affection which you have inspired, affection which, as you see, has changed my character, wakened me out of that indifference which I fancied was an inherent part of my nature, and made me as vehement and eager as a boy."

"All this, sir," said Isabel, "is very useless, and I must

beg you to leave me. I am glad that you repent of evil that you have done. I hope that your repentance is sincere. I forgive you the pain that you have inflicted on me with all my heart; but all that I can promise is, that my conduct towards you, when we meet accidentally, will be regulated by yours towards me. If, as you say, you give me no farther occasion either for offence or for anxiety regarding your purposes, I will refrain from showing towards you those feelings which your previous behaviour might well inspire; but the moment that you insult me, after what has passed, with one word upon the subject of those wishes which have brought so much misery upon me, that instant I regard you and treat you as the bitterest enemy that fate has ever sent me. Now, sir, let me beseech you to leave me, for I cannot hear one word more upon these matters."

The Count saw that she was determined, and withdrew, renewing the assurances he had given; but in the antechamber he paused again, looking bitterly down upon the ground. "Will it succeed?" he muttered to himself—"will it succeed?—She seems as obdurate as iron. I doubt it much, even with the King's aid."

He moved two or three steps farther on, and quitting the antechamber, entered one of the long galleries of the palace, one side of which was pierced by manifold tall windows, throwing a bright and checkered light across. There he paused again, and mused for several minutes; but while he did so, another man entered the gallery from the opposite end, and approached him with that calm and stealthy step, which does not proclaim its own advance by the sound of any footfall.

At length a shadow crossing the light made the Count look up, exclaiming, "Ha, my Lord of Masseran! The very man I could have wished to see."

"Not more than I wished to see the Count de Meyrand," replied the Lord of Masseran, with a sweet smile. "I have not heard what progress you have made during the day. I only know that you have had opportunity."

"Which has proved not a little fruitless," replied the Count. "I saw her at the court this morning, as you know, but she was ice itself. I watched my opportunity, however, this afternoon, and have now seen her alone. According to your hint, I assured her that I repented heartily of the past, promised to give no more occasion of offence, besought her only to endure my presence and acquaintance with common courtesy, and ——"

"But did you let her see that you loved her still?" demanded the Lord of Masseran. "Did you tell her how passionately you loved her? Did you tell her——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the Count, "I told her all that, and more than that—I spoke vehemently and eagerly, for, by Heaven, there I spoke but the truth."

"But what did she say?" demanded his counsellor. "Did she yield? Did she reply favourably?"

"Not she," answered the Count. "She spoke, indeed, an icy forgiveness, in harsh and chilling words. But when I would have talked to her somewhat more of my passion, when I would have laid all that I have done amiss upon the fiery love which she had inspired, she rose in anger to call her people round her; and though I soothed, and tried to quiet her, yet all I could gain was a repetition of the same cold forgiveness, and a promise to shape her conduct according to mine, with a menace, if I ever mentioned love to her again."

"And what would you have more, my dear Count?" demanded the Lord of Masseran, with a meaning smile. "Shape her conduct to yours! Ha, ha, ha! Why, then, you know well how to shape your own. Be gentle with her for a day or two, then press her warmly, and more warmly. By my life, you will find such sins more and more easily forgiven each day. Offend her with love in the morning, then kneel at her feet and crave pardon, bedewing her hand with tears half the evening, and brush away the tears with kisses, and be again forgiven. Is woman's heart so new a study to you, Count, as not to know that whenever she tells you what you are not to do, she tells, in fact, what it is you are to do; and that in affairs of the heart a woman's words are to be interpreted, like morning dreams, reversedly?"

"Perhaps you are right," replied the Count de Meyrand; "for the truth is this, my good lord, that a man, in matters of love, is like a gamester: so long as he plays coolly and indifferently, his skill and his experience have their effect; but if once he gets deeply excited and interested, he sees nothing but the object before him, and loses the advantages which present themselves."

"At all events," said the Lord of Masseran, "you have obtained one advantage, and even while you fancied you were not successful, have been more successful than I could have anticipated. Instead of shunning you, and cutting you off from all opportunity of urging your suit, she now agrees to meet you with courtesy as an acquaintance. It will be

your own fault if you are not soon received with regard as a friend, and yielded to with affection as a lover. I am going to visit her even now myself, and I will not fail to aid your pursuit. But you must remember," he added, with a laugh, "if you succeed, you must build me up again that tower, which by its fall did us such good service."

"If I succeed, I will build you a dozen castles," answered the Count de Meyrand; "and why should I not succeed? She is but a woman, and they are all alike."

With these words they parted; and the Lord of Masseran pursued his way to the chamber where the Count de Meyrand had left Isabel de Brienne. Thither we must follow him, in order to see how far his words to the Count corresponded with his actions. After pausing for a moment in the antechamber to think, he entered with a quick step, as if in great haste and eagerness; and approaching Isabel, he said—addressing her, as he usually did, without any of that tone of familiar intimacy which the near connexion existing between them might have produced—"I have just met the Count de Meyrand, and I fear, mademoiselle, that he has been intruding upon you, and causing you pain?"

"He has, indeed, my lord," replied Isabel; "but he has promised me most faithfully to abstain from doing so for the future, and, in fact, to give me no further cause of any kind for offence."

The Lord of Masseran's lip curled into a sneer, and for a moment or two he purposely made no reply. "If you are satisfied with such an assurance," he answered, at length, "I have no reason to be dissatisfied, for of course it tends to what I have always wished: that you should give him your hand."

Isabel gazed in his face for a moment, with a look of surprise and horror. "What do you mean?" she asked, at length.

"Simply," replied the Lord of Masseran, "that the Count de Meyrand is now in the right course, and must succeed. He was in the wrong course long enough, and so obstinate therein, that he well nigh ruined me as well as himself."

"I do not understand you," replied Isabel, impatiently. "How did he well nigh ruin you, my lord? Me he has certainly rendered most unhappy."

"He has well nigh ruined me," replied the Lord of Masseran, "by inducing me to do a thousand things in favour of his love for you, which I never else should have thought of. You cannot suppose, for one moment, that all those strange

and dangerous schemes which he pursued were mine. I had no interest in the matter, and can prove at any time that everything was done at his suggestion."

Isabel cast down her eyes in thought, and the Lord of Masseran, feeling that she might have some difficulty in believing him to be so soft and easy in disposition, as to be led to anything without strong motives, added, in a low tone, "He had me in some degree in his power, it is true, and I could not refuse. Otherwise, I never would have consented."

"May I ask, my lord," said Isabel, looking up in his face, "what it was you meant just now, when you said that the Count was in the right course, and must succeed?"

The Lord of Masseran's countenance, which had before been grave, now assumed a quiet smile, and he replied, "I meant that he was in a course of that gentleness and soothing courtesy, which wins without striving. Who ever saw a fowler rush upon his prey like a lion? he rather creeps quietly up, and takes it by surprise; and so must man do with woman's heart. Besides, there is power and influence with him, which you cannot well resist. Though the King would not force your inclination, Meyrand has his full countenance in seeking your hand, and probably has been advised by him—for no one is more skilled in such matters than Henry—to affect moderation. Perhaps the King sees, that at heart you are not disposed towards a convent; and he will therefore keep the matter going on for a month or two, till a little decent time elapses, after which he will, with a gentle and kindly use of his authority, make Meyrand happy with your hand. Meyrand, in the meantime, will treat you tenderly and softly, I am sure—will not urge you at first, but will go gently from the friend into the lover; and then you will find him ardent enough, no doubt."

Isabel had turned deadly pale as the Lord of Masseran spoke: her breath seemed to come with difficulty; and at length waving her hand, to stop him from going on, she said, with a great effort, "I am faint, my lord,—I pray you send my women—another time, when I am better."

The Lord of Masseran seeing that what he had said had produced fully the effect he intended, hurried from the room, as if in great fear and anxiety, to call some of the female attendants to Isabel's assistance. They went to her in haste, and found her sunk from her chair upon the floor. She had not absolutely fainted; and when they raised her, she burst into a convulsive fit of tears, which for the time relieved her.

"There is no time to be lost," she said to herself, when she

had somewhat recovered; and although the women attempted to dissuade her from making the effort, she succeeded in writing a few lines to the Maréchal de Vieilleville, beseeching him not to fail in asking an audience for her of the King at as early an hour as possible. "I will leave no doubt of my wishes," said Isabel to herself; "and this is a request which has never yet been denied."

CHAPTER XXV.

The King was speaking to the Dauphin Francis as Isabel, conducted by the Maréchal de Vieilleville, entered the royal cabinet at the hour of nine in the morning of the following day. The Prince was standing near the door unbonneted, but had apparently asked his father some final question ere he left the room, to which Henry replied,—"On no account! Lay my commands upon him, Francis. He is in the King's hand, and none shall judge but myself.—Farther, do as I bade you."

The Dauphin bowed his head, and withdrew; and Henry, turning to Isabel de Brienne, welcomed her with a gracious smile, which gave her good hope of a favourable audience.

"Your good friend, here, Monsieur de Vieilleville," said the King, "has told me, fair lady, that you wish to speak with me on matters of much importance. I had hoped that we had already concluded so much of your business that the rest might stand over till both you and I had thought maturely of the matter. However, as you wish it, and as I have now an hour to spare, I am ready to give you full attention."

"Your majesty is most gracious," replied Isabel, "and ever has been most gracious to me; but I trust that you will hear me patiently, and grant me a request which has never yet, I believe, been denied to any lady of the realm who was disposed to ask it."

"Nay, nay," said the King, interrupting her. "Not that request again! For your own sake, I would have you think over it for at least a month or two; and for the sake of another also who loves you well, I would have you not only think over it, but abandon it altogether."

The King spoke with a smile; but Isabel de Brienne replied gravely and sadly, "I beseech your majesty, call it not loving me well. He may love much, but he loves much amiss;

and it is his conduct and the evident hopes that he entertains, which make me the more eager, by putting the final barrier between myself and the world for ever, to escape from his persecution, or, at all events, to convince him that his expectations are vain."

"Nay, you are too severe," said the King. "What has he done so deeply to offend you? He has but sought, as any man might well seek, to obtain a treasure which was withheld from him."

"I know not well, sire," replied Isabel, whose generous spirit was roused at what she judged the defence of guilt—"I know not what is the code of honour amongst men. It seems to me that they often fight and spill each other's blood because they are accused of dishonourable acts, which yet they commit every day. I know not whether the dishonour should lie in doing the wrong, or being told that we have done it. Methinks in the former; and, if so, when Monsieur de Meyrand betrayed, deceived, and falsified the truth to his friend, he was doing no very honourable act. I beseech your majesty to pardon my boldness; but you ask me, sire, what great cause of offence he has given me. In the tale I lately told your majesty I mentioned many an offence—many that I consider dark, ungentlemanly, and dishonest deeds; and if I could fancy that the fault was in me and in any idle beauty my face or person may possess, rather than in him and the corruption of his own heart, I should hate myself as a sharer in things that I condemn and despise. As to offences towards me in all these disgraceful acts I speak of, I forgive them freely; but Heaven forbid that I should wed the man who has committed them; for, as I must ever despise him, I could never love him. Let your majesty but recollect what he has done, and what I have suffered from him:" and she calmly and deliberately recapitulated all that she had observed or knew of the conduct of the Count de Meyrand.

She remarked that, while she was speaking, the King took notes of what she said regarding the Count; and when she had ended that matter, she added, "I beseech your majesty to remember I am not making an accusation, or asking any punishment upon this gentleman. I have said I forgive him; and when I do so, it is without reserve; but I only beseech your majesty to take my case into your gracious consideration, and to suffer me to retire at once into any convent you may please to name; for if it were your royal will that, while at your court, I should be exposed to what I underwent yesterday, my heart would break with the misery it suffered, and the grave would be the cell which gave me repose."

"I grieve, my dear young lady," said the King, in reply, "not only that Meyrand is so distasteful to you, but that he has, as I must own, given you good cause to view his conduct with disapprobation. However, I will not press him upon you, and therefore there can be no reason why you should not remain at the court. Why—if exempt from his pursuit—why should you fly from us, and bury all your charms and graces in a dull convent? There are thousands of noble gentlemen in France who would give half their heritage for one smile from that sweet lip. These convents rob us of half our loveliest dames; and, good faith, like that luxurious monster, my namesake the Eighth of England, I have a great mind to suppress all the monasteries and nunneries in the realm. By Heaven, I hate these convents."

"Oh, say not so, sir—say not so!" said Isabel. "They are the refuge of many a wrung and broken heart. They are the places where the sweet secret tears of blasted affection may be best poured forth. They are the sanctuaries of that holy grief which God gives man to wean him from the earth. There, too, remorse may hide his trembling head, and penitence and prayer call down hope from heaven. Ah, no! we may hate the abuse of them, sire, but I now feel myself that in every land there is a need of some place set apart to solitude."

"I will not reason with you on the policy of such things," said the King, smiling; "but one result is very necessary to guard against—the natural instability of human resolutions: and there is no such effectual way of so doing, as to give time for forming those resolutions and considering them properly before they are made irrevocable The law requires a year of probation, and so far does its duty; but in regard to those whom we esteem and love, we require other and better trials of the resolve before we even permit that year of probation to begin; for we well know the means used during novitiate to prevent all retraction. Thus must I still return to my point—putting the Count de Meyrand out of the question—there are, as I have said, a thousand other noble gentlemen in France ready to enter the lists as aspirants to this fair hand. Surely, out of them all, you may choose some one who may make you happy and be happy with you; and I wish you to pause, reflect, and judge before you decide. Time will heal the wounds from which you now suffer, and we may soon see you a bright and happy bride."

"Never, your majesty," replied Isabel, firmly. "I can assure you, you mistake me. I have no heart to give, and without it I will never give my hand. Had my father plighted

me to one I did not know—one who, after the acquaintance of a day, and the exchange of half-a-dozen words, was destined to be my husband without farther knowledge or inclination on my part—the case might be as your majesty supposes; but loving and having loved from infancy until now, a man whom my father chose because he knew that he would possess my affection and ever make me happy, my spirit is widowed, and my heart is buried in the grave of him I loved. I do beseech your majesty, by everything that may move you, to grant my prayer, and let me seek the only shelter where I can hope for repose and peace."

"Well," said the King, dipping the pen in the ink, with a smile and a shake of the head, as if he still doubted—"well, fair Isabel, if it must be so, I will yield. Yet still, once more let me ask you, are you fixed and determined? Recollect the changes that time works in human resolutions. If there can be satisfactory proof given that this Count of Meyrand was really a sharer in the acts that you mention, so far from favouring his suit, I will banish him from the court as long as you remain in it. If, therefore, it is on that account you fear, put him entirely out of the question, and then think whether, with the course of time, your grief may not be softened down, your heart opened to new sensations, and your affections find a worthy successor to him whom you have lost. Urge her, De Vieilleville, to consider this."

"It is of no use, my lord," replied Isabel, somewhat mortified at seeing a smile still upon the King's countenance, as if he thought that her resolution was affected—"it is of no use. If any voice could move me, it would, of course be that of your majesty; but my purpose is fixed, and I do assure you most solemnly that my hand shall never be given to any man upon this earth! To this I pledge myself beyond all recall."

"Nay, then," answered Henry, "if that be the case, I have nothing to do but yield my consent," and after writing for a few moments on a paper that lay before him, he took it up and read,—"I do hereby signify my full consent and permission that Isabel, Demoiselle de Brienne, shall enter into any convent or community of regular nuns, or canonesses that she may think fit to choose, having fulfilled the novitiate, and all preparatory rules and regulations as established by the law of the land, and the forms and ordinances of the community selected."

Still, however, he held the paper in his hand, saying, "Nevertheless, I do not like to give it."

"I beseech you, sire, to do so," said Isabel, who at that

moment looked to the possession of that paper as her great hope of peace and tranquillity through life.

"Nay, wait one moment," said the King: "there is a gentleman for whom I have a high esteem, of great rank and consideration, a member of one of the most noble and princely families of France—some branches of which, indeed, are allied to our royal house—handsome, gallant, and so captivating in demeanour, that I cannot fancy any lady's heart long resisting persuasion such as his. I recollect, in days long gone, to have seen in his eyes no light admiration when the fair Isabel de Brienne passed by, and I do believe he would consider himself the happiest man in France if he could move her from this passion for a nunnery. I will but——"

"Nay, nay, I beseech you, sire!" cried Isabel, throwing herself upon her knees before him. "Oh, spare me! spare me!" But Henry gently disengaged the hand which she had taken to detain him, and passing by, left the cabinet.

Isabel wrung her hands—"Oh, my lord!" she said, turning to Monsieur de Vieilleville, "this is a new misery the King is bringing on me."

De Vieilleville soothed her, assured her that the King meant kindly by her, and would not urge her beyond a certain point; but he kept that sort of grave and serious countenance which made her feel that such topics of consolation, though suggested to calm her, might not be believed, even by himself. Her heart beat with anxiety and apprehension, and she could scarcely keep the tears from falling over her cheeks, when she heard the steps of Henry and some one else again approaching the cabinet. It cost her a terrible struggle with her own heart to master her emotions, and to summon resolution sufficient to think briefly over her situation, and how she should behave. Before she could determine on anything more than the mere general purpose of again and again expressing her resolution, in as strong language as she could use, the door of the cabinet opened. Her back was still turned towards it, her eyes bent upon the ground, as if to avoid seeing the person thus brought to importune her sorrowful heart for love it could not give, and she only drew a step aside, to afford the monarch room to pass at once to his chair.

As he did pass, however, there was another hand laid upon her arm, and the voice of some one beside her said, "Isabel!"

She started back—turned towards him—lifted her eyes—and, with a long, loud scream, before any one could catch her, fell senseless on the floor.

"Good Heaven, I have carried this too far!" exclaimed the King, starting forward, and aiding with his own hands to raise her head.

"She is only fainting, your majesty," said Vieilleville, "I will run and call your physician to her."

"No, no!" said the King, "bring some water, but do not mention what has occurred. We have many matters to deal with, and must do it carefully.—See, she begins to revive."

When Isabel de Brienne opened her eyes again, the first face she saw was that of Bernard de Rohan; and her first greeting on her return to consciousness, was the warm kiss of deep and pure affection. She was still lying on the floor, with her head propped by cushions of purple velvet, and her shoulders supported by Bernard's left arm, while with his right hand he clasped hers tenderly.

We need not pause upon the meeting. We need not pause upon the feelings that were excited in the bosoms of either; upon the words that were spoken as soon as Isabel recovered the power of utterance; or upon the overpowering joy, which repaid her for all that she had suffered. It often happens with us in life, that we know not the intensity of our own affections till they are severely tried. Love, ay, and even sometimes hate, will lie slumbering at the bottom of the heart with very little apparent power, till something rouses the genius or the fiend, and he starts up, armed with more than gigantic power. Isabel had now learned how deeply she loved; and although Bernard de Rohan had ever found her full of the tenderness, the sweetness, the devotion of affection, it was not till this moment that he was met with all the open ardour and intensity of feeling which he himself experienced towards her. She hung upon the bosom of him whom she had fancied lost to her for ever. She gazed with deep affection in his eyes. She hid her face upon his shoulder and wept. All, all the signs and tokens of joy and love that human nature can display, from smiles to tears, were given as his welcome back from death to life—and he was very happy.

They were alone when Isabel first recovered, for Henry's kindly heart had made him draw away the Maréchal de Vieilleville when he saw consciousness returning, in order to leave the lovers for a short space alone. In a few minutes, however, the King came back, and seating himself at the table, he gazed with a smile upon Isabel, saying, "Now, my rash young lady, here is the King's permission for you to enter whatsoever convent you think fit. Your resolution, you said,

was unchangeable. You vowed that you would never give your hand to any man in life. What am I to think now?"

Isabel looked down for a moment, and then raising her eyes with a smile, even while the warm blood mantled in her cheek, she replied, "I have given him my hand already, your majesty."

A slight frown came upon the King's brow; and with the quickened perception of love, Isabel saw in a moment that she might rouse in Henry's heart the lion of authority, to oppose her own wishes, if she spoke of the marriage between her and Bernard de Rohan being lawful, notwithstanding the royal edict. She added, therefore, the next moment, "I trust, sire, that your majesty's consent in this case may be obtained more easily than on the occasion of my late petition, which I now withdraw."

"Well and rightly spoken, fair lady," said the King, his good humour at once returning. "I have some chiding to give you, Baron," he added, addressing Bernard de Rohan, "for having ventured clandestinely, and without lawful sanction, to unite yourself to this young lady by a marriage which, as you now well know, is null and void. For that fault, however, you shall receive pardon, in consideration of your good services in Piedmont; and your claim to her hand shall have favourable consideration."

Bernard de Rohan, perhaps, might not feel so well inclined as Isabel to bow the head to the King's will; but there was no resource, and he submitted, though not without attempting to justify himself. "I trust to your majesty's gracious favour," he said, "to make me at length happy, after enduring so much as I have endured; but I beseech you to consider that the act which I ventured to do was not altogether so unjustifiable as it may have been represented. From all that I saw of the Lord of Masseran; from all that Monsieur de Brissac communicated to me concerning his doubtful faith towards your majesty; from all that Isabel herself told me of his plans and purposes, I judged, perhaps wrongly, that not a moment's time was to be lost in freeing her from the restraint in which she was held. No possible means existed of so doing, except by aiding her to escape, and flying with her. To have done so without being able to call her my wife might have subjected her to unjust and evil imputations. I had her father's full and written consent. Her mother had known of that consent being given, and had never raised her voice against it. I therefore might fairly conceive that I had the approbation of both her parents. It was our intention, I most solemnly

assure your majesty, so far from treating your authority with any disrespect, to hasten to your court with all speed, for the purpose of casting ourselves at your feet, and beseeching your approval. In these circumstances, I trust that you will grant us your gracious pardon, and with the same generous kindness which you have displayed, in bringing us together again so soon, will confirm by your royal will, the union in which we ventured to engage."

"God loves the free giver, my good young friend," replied the King; "and, although there is in human nature a propensity to enhance the favours that we have it in our power to confer by exciting anxiety and impatience, even in those to whom we wish well, by affecting delay and hesitation, yet would I not do so in the present case, were it possible to grant your request. The edict by which all such marriages are annulled has become the law of the land; and laws are too solemn things to be played with, to be enacted one day, revoked, altered, amended another, as ignorance and stupidity may have created defects in their original state, or as caprice and vacillation may cause a change of opinion afterwards. This law was long thought of, and promulgated with reluctance, upon the show of absolute necessity. Such being the case, you must consider your marriage as null; but as I do sincerely believe that, in contracting it, you had no thought of offence, and as the will of this young lady's father, joined with her own affection and her brother's consent, must overbear what seems the unreasonable opposition of her mother, your marriage shall take place with all speed, and with my full consent and approbation. In the meantime, Monsieur de Rohan, you are our guest at Fontainbleau; and when I place the honour of this fair lady in your good charge and keeping, I know that I trust to a rock which is not to be shaken."

Bernard and Isabel kissed the King's hand, with deep gratitude for the kindness that he showed them, and were about to retire, when a page entered, saying, "The Count de Meyrand, sire, waits without, according to your majesty's commands of yesterday."

The eyes of Bernard de Rohan blazed in a moment. "I do beseech your majesty," he said, "to let me deal with that most dishonest man according to the usages and customs of gentlemen and soldiers."

Isabel, however, cast herself at the King's feet, saying, "Oh no, sire! no! under the protection of your mighty arm, he can do us no farther harm. Bid Bernard forgive him, as

I forgive him, and let not the hand that, by your kindness, is soon to be clasped in mine at the altar—let not that generous hand which has never been stained with any but the blood of your majesty's enemies, be dyed with that of a fellow-subject!"

"She is right, Monsieur de Rohan; she is right," said the King, "and only entreats me to do what I had before determined. Of course the Dauphin gave you my message this morning before I saw you? By that you must abide, remembering, that if on any pretence whatsoever you violate my commands, and draw your sword upon the Count de Meyrand, I retract the promise which I have made, and this lady's hand shall never be yours so long as I am King of France. To this I pledge my honour! I myself will deal with the Count de Meyrand. What he has done requires the chastisement of my Prévôt, rather than the chivalrous kind of punishment which you propose. I will not see him now; but some two hours hence, when my son and some others are present, I will inquire into his conduct, and may then summon you. For the time, retire with Monsieur de Vieilleville to his apartments, where, as you may have much to say to one another, you may well spend an hour or two together."

The latter part of the King's directions Bernard de Rohan was very willing to obey; and though his heart burned to chastise with his own arm the man who had betrayed him, yet the hand of Isabel was too precious a boon to be risked for such an object; and he knew that Henry was not one to forget the menace he had used, in case of disobedience.

CHAPTER XXVI.

As the chambers of the palace of Fontainbleau were then arranged, there was—between the great gallery and the audience-chamber in which the king on ordinary occasions received deputations, and other considerable bodies of people on business too numerous to be admitted to his cabinet—a large anteroom, with several doors, some leading to staircases, some to the great gallery, and some to other chambers as well as to the audience hall. Across this anteroom, the Count de Meyrand was pacing with a gloomy brow and a slow step, when he was met by the Lord of Masseran, entering suddenly by a door which led from a back staircase.

The brow of the latter was even darker than that of the Count, but it bore more the aspect of terror than discontent; and his eyes, generally so calm and searching, now looked somewhat wild and astray, while his cheek was as pale as death. The instant he saw Meyrand he paused, as if he would fain have gone back; but the Count's eyes were upon him, and the Savoyard, instantly reversing the impulse, advanced rapidly, and grasped him by the hand.

"You seem agitated, Masseran," said the Count de Meyrand. "What is the matter? The King has just refused me an audience—things are not going well."

"Not going well!" exclaimed the Lord of Masseran. "By heavens, they are not, Monsieur de Meyrand!—What is the matter?—You, the lover of Isabel de Brienne, and not know what is the matter! I should have thought that the very feeling of the air would have told you. It lies heavy upon my chest."

"How! is she ill?" demanded the Count, eagerly. "Why look you so scared? Is she ill, I say?"

"Ill! Not she!" exclaimed the Lord of Masseran. "She is well—too well! But I for one have keener perceptions when an enemy is near. I seem to feel it in the very air he breathes. Bernard de Rohan has come to life again. The tale they told us of his being crushed under the tower is false. Either he has done the thing himself, to favour his own escape, or else the burning of that accursed tower has opened the way for him to fly."

The first impulse of the Count de Meyrand was to lay his hand upon the hilt of his sword, for he felt that there could be no longer any concealment, and that the rivalry between him and Bernard de Rohan must be one of life and death. The moment after, however, he drew his hand back quietly, as if ashamed of the emotion he displayed, and demanded, in a calm tone, "Pray, where have you heard of all this? Where is this gallant chevalier? We must give him a warm reception."

"How did I hear of it?" exclaimed the Lord of Masseran, impatient at the indifference which he knew to be affected. "My own eyes told me. Where is this gallant chevalier? In this very palace, not many hundred yards from this spot, seated by Isabel de Brienne, doubtless, for I saw them both passing towards the apartments of Vieilleville, with her hand clasped in his, and the old Maréchal performing the office of Mercury, and doing the honours of Fontainbleau."

The fingers of the Count de Meyrand clasped tight into

the palms of his hands, and he fixed his eyes upon the ground with a frowning brow. These, however, were the only signs of emotion that he suffered to appear; and he remained for some minutes without uttering a word, though the Lord of Masseran continued to gaze upon his countenance with a keen and inquiring air, which seemed to ask, "Have you nothing to suggest? Have you no plan to propose?"

"Come with me, Masseran," replied the Count de Meyrand, at length—"come with me, and let us talk this matter over. It were sad to be foiled at this last moment."

"It were sad, indeed," murmured the Lord of Masseran, "when this very morning it seemed that the whole was in my hand, and it needed but a few hours to complete the work."

"Psha!" said the Count, not much heeding what he said. "A few hours, a few days, a few weeks, or years, are nothing in the eye of fate. If we miss the precise moment, whether it be by a minute or a century, matters not, we have lost the great talisman for ever. Come with me. Let us consult and consider whether that moment is missed. The matter must soon be brought to a decision. Bernard de Rohan, in all probability, must be met and disposed of at the sword's point. That would vex me little; for though he be a stout and skilful man at arms, there are others no less so than he, and I should never be unwilling, for a great prize, to risk an equal stake with any man. Young rash-headed boys run into these encounters for mere sport, and risk life and all its joys for no great and probable object. With me, however, all these things are matters of calculation and of common sense, my good friend; and I would have brought it to the arbitrament of the sword long ago, if I had thought that the prize could be won by such means. But with a woman like Isabel de Brienne, to conquer in such mortal strife with him she loved, would be to purchase hatred, not affection—to bar, not to open the way. Could I find means not to kill him, but to overthrow, to cripple, to disgrace him, to make him beg his life at the sword's point, or by some other way to cast dishonour on his once bright name, that indeed might be more successful. Come with me, Masseran, come with me. You Italians are generally adepts at such things as these, and we must consider of the matter well."

Thus saying, he led the way to the apartments which had been assigned to the Lord of Masseran, and there remained closeted with his dark confederate, till one of the King's pages

came to summon him to the presence of Henry. By the time the boy entered the room where they sat, however, there had come a smile upon the countenance of Meyrand; and rising with a graceful and a stately air, which he knew well how to assume, he followed through the gallery towards the audience chamber. At the end of the corridor, the boy advanced across the anteroom which we have mentioned, and threw open the doors, and in a moment after, the Count stood in the presence of his sovereign.

Henry was seated at the upper end of the room, looking up towards the Duchess de Valentinois, who stood beside him on his right, while, on the other hand, appeared the Dauphin and the Princess Claude. Near the Duchess was Bernard de Rohan with Isabel de Brienne, and Mademoiselle de Scepeaux, the daughter of the Maréchal de Vieilleville, while in other parts of the circle were one or two of the inferior ministers of the crown, and some of the most distinguished courtiers. The King was habited as he had been in the morning; that is to say, in black velvet, richly embroidered and laced with gold. But Bernard de Rohan was no longer in the riding suit which he had previously worn; for, having procured garments from his own long-left dwelling, he appeared in all the splendour displayed by courtiers of that day, and well became the costly habit that he wore. Isabel de Brienne, too, had cast off the deep mourning she had assumed, and the lustre of her eyes, the varying colour of her cheek, the trembling smile that played in joyful agitation on her lip, all told that the mourning was gone from her heart also.

Each object on which the eye of the Count rested added fire to the torture that he felt; but there was something in the sight of the Duchess of Valentinois, and in the position in which she stood between his rival and the King, that both pained and embarrassed him. During the last day or two he had remarked a change in her demeanour, and had perceived that she did not exert her influence zealously in his behalf; and the interview which had taken place between himself and her, on his late arrival in Paris, put his most private views almost entirely at her command, so that he would willingly have had her absent from the scene. By this time, however, he had made up his mind to the course he had to pursue, and the glimpse which the Lord of Masseran had caught of Bernard de Rohan had given the Count the great advantage of coming to face his rival well prepared.

He advanced, then, into the midst of the circle, with his

head erect, his eye clear, his countenance calm and untroubled, and bowing with graceful ease to the King, he ran his eye over the rest of the circle, without flinching in the slightest degree beneath the stern gaze of Bernard de Rohan, or the expectant and inquiring glances of the more indifferent spectators. When he had thus made his salutation, he was drawing a step back, as if to take his place at the end of the line, when Henry addressed him.

"Monsieur de Meyrand," said the King, "I have sent for you in regard to serious charges which have been made against you, and which it becomes you to answer, both as a French gentleman, a soldier, and a man of honour. You have had good reason to know that we regard you with some favour, and we trust to find, by the explanations you may give, that our favour was not really undeserved."

The King paused, as if expecting the Count to reply; and Meyrand answered at once, without waiting to hear the charges, very willing to take the initiative upon himself.

"From those I see in your majesty's presence," he said, "and from the fraud of a reported death—spread for what purposes the parties themselves best know—I can easily divine the nature of the charges to which you, sire, allude, and am ready to repel them as befits a man of honour. I see here, sire, a fair lady, to whose hand, but yesterday, I had your majesty's permission and sanction to aspire ——"

"You are right in that, sir," interrupted the King. "But in the first place, at that time, I was not aware—fully, at least—of the conduct which you had pursued; and, in the next place, I believed the hand of that lady to be free from all other engagements: but after my return from hunting in the course of yesterday, I met with our gallant friend here, Monsieur de Rohan, and with no slight pleasure found him living whom we had all imagined to be dead."

"Whether your majesty have withdrawn the permission that you gave," continued the Count de Meyrand, "I cannot tell; but I trust not; and I know your majesty is too just to believe charges upon mere hearsay. The facts are very simple, however they may have been concealed. Monsieur de Rohan and myself are rivals. He has had many advantages over me in pursuing his suit, and I, in consequence, have resorted to every fair means and just stratagem to favour my suit also. I deny it not! I have done it! Love for this lady has been the motive, and love for her has suggested the means. But if Monsieur de Rohan dares to say that I have done aught dishonourable or wrong, I here, in the presence

of your majesty, give him the lie; and dare him to prove his words upon my body, as becomes a gentleman and a soldier."

Bernard de Rohan took a step forward, with his colour somewhat heightened and his brow bent. The King, however, waved him back, saying, "I will hear you in a moment, Monsieur de Rohan; but first let me tell this gentleman that the charge against him, of which I speak, is not made by you, but by this lady, who accuses the Count de Meyrand of having, together with the Lord of Masseran, contrived and executed various schemes unworthy of a French gentleman and a man of honour. The Marquis of Masseran—a sovereign prince himself—is not amenable to us, but only to his suzerain, our cousin the Duke of Savoy. But Monsieur de Meyrand may well be questioned as to his conduct; and either now, or at some future time, shall be called upon to show whether he did or did not use unjustifiable means for getting Mademoiselle de Brienne into his hands. What were you about to say, Monsieur de Rohan?"

"Simply, my lord," replied Bernard de Rohan, "to reiterate in my own name the charges made against the Count de Meyrand by Mademoiselle de Brienne, and to add in distinct terms that he, Adrian of Meyrand, is a false and treacherous villain, who has deceived his friend, betrayed those that trusted him, and forgotten his own honour. Farther, I am ready, with your majesty's permission, which I earnestly crave, to prove these words upon him with my sword, and also to establish them by positive evidence, to your full satisfaction."

"I beseech you, sire," said the Count de Meyrand, "let the matter be speedily and briefly settled. As to entering into any other proofs, after the words that have been spoken, that were needless. Hand to hand, as two French gentlemen, let us determine our difference. No other investigation is required. I own, without fear or shame, that I have used all fair means to win this lady's love; but I pronounce that any one who says, that what I did, I did dishonourably, speaks falsely, and is a knave."

"The matter, Monsieur de Meyrand," replied the King, "is not so easily settled as you seem to think. Did cowardice always accompany vice, evil would not walk so boldly as she does. Many a man who has dared to do a bad act, will dare to justify it at the risk of life; but *we* must judge by other proofs; and I ask you, Monsieur de Meyrand, whether now, in my presence, you are ready to go into the investigation of

the charges against you, or whether you would have farther time?"

"I see no use, sire," said the Count de Meyrand, "of yielding any investigation regarding such matters. Monsieur de Rohan has already ——"

"The charges are not alone those of Monsieur de Rohan," said the King, interrupting him. "Were that the case, perhaps we might give your enmity its course, but the charges are those of Mademoiselle de Brienne."

"It matters little, sire, whose they be," replied the Count, boldly; "I have already said what I acknowledge. The manner in which it may be told by one party or the other will make all the difference; a shade may be cast here, or a shade there; suspicions may be brought to aggravate; words and deeds may be magnified and distorted. In cases like this, investigation can do no good; the matter turns upon a point of honour, and can be decided but by one means. The charges may be Mademoiselle de Brienne's. Your majesty avers it, and therefore it is: but the Baron de Rohan takes the charge upon himself. So let the matter rest between me and her champion."

"By Heaven, sir," exclaimed the King, his eye flashing, and his cheek growing red, "you shall find that the King is her champion, and it may not be so easy to deal with him as any other. You refuse, sir, to meet the charges brought against you, as I think they should be met, and I lay my commands once more on Monsieur de Rohan, on no account or consideration whatsoever, either publicly or privately, to give you the meeting that you desire."

"Commands, doubtless, very easily obeyed," muttered the Count between his teeth; but the King instantly checked him sternly.

"Were you, sir," he said, "as eminently distinguished for active and daring courage—were you as renowned a soldier, and as successful an officer, as Monsieur de Rohan—even then your sneer could not touch a man who, during the whole of the Italian wars, let no post slip without bringing us some tidings of his gallant and daring actions. As it is, sir, inferior to him in every respect, he may well refuse you the meeting that you seek, without any imputation on his courage; at all events, the King's commands fully justify him, and render your sneer contemptible."

"Perchance, sire," replied the Count de Meyrand, still unabashed, and acting on the plan he had previously laid out,—"perchance, ere many days be over, I may have some-

thing more than sneers to bring against this honourable gentleman. Your majesty is now, I see, completely deceived; but the deception will not last long, and then——"

"This is too bold and barefaced," said the King. "If you suppose, sir, that by vague and unsupported words like these you can leave the taint of suspicion upon a tried and honourable man, you are very much deceived; and, for the very attempt, as well as for the charges which you refuse to meet, I banish you from this court; and you will be pleased to remain in the neighbourhood of your own estates near Châteaudun, and not to approach within twenty leagues of the city of Paris, or the castle of Fontainbleau. I give you one day to make your preparations."

The Count de Meyrand, fully resolved not to suffer the charges against him to be thoroughly investigated, had ventured even to offend the King rather than suffer such a result to take place; but he by no means wished to do so more than necessary; and he replied with a low inclination of the head, "I bow most humbly to your majesty's pleasure. Your will in this, as in all other things, must be my law. It is only to see your majesty prejudiced against me, by the representations of one who loves you less than I do, that grieves me bitterly."

"No more, sir, no more," replied Henry, waving his hand, "I am quite satisfied. Those who will not answer such charges must be deemed guilty. You may retire."

CHAPTER XXVII.

I RECOLLECT hearing a friend describe an interview he once had with Beethoven, which gave me a more sensible idea of the triumph of the spirit over the body, of the sublime power of imagination over the weakness of our corporal organs, than anything else that I ever met with. As is well known, the great musician was very deaf, and much more so at some moments than at others. When the visitor entered, Beethoven was playing one of his finest compositions, which had not at that time been given to the world, and his back being turned towards the door, he did not perceive that any one came in. As he went on, all the various appearances of intense delight and emotion passed over his countenance, and at length the tears rolled down his cheeks as he con-

cluded. The visitor then laid his hand upon his arm, and made him aware of how great was his admiration of all that he had just heard.

"Alas! my friend," replied the great harmonist, "I have not heard a single note. I can only imagine it."

But he had imagined and had felt it all; and such as the music thus imagined, is happiness to the human heart. It consists of sensations within ourselves, varying, changing, fleeting, but all forming one grand harmony for our own hearts, and for our hearts alone.

There is nothing more difficult to paint and to dwell upon than happiness; for there is something in the human mind requiring that variety which each individual may find in positive enjoyment himself, but which is not easily derivable from any account of happiness in others. Our own happiness supplies us with variety from the various sensations and actions produced in our own mind. Each hour, each moment, may bring such a change of feeling, such a new tone from the same instrument, such a fresh chord in the same harmony, that it may never pall upon our own sense; but others cannot be made to see, or feel, or hear, that which is going on in the secret chambers of our own bosom, and he who sits down to read a long description of the happiness of any other human beings, is much like a person reading the bill of a concert to which he cannot be admitted. Memory may tell him that some of the pieces are very beautiful. Imagination may try to conjure up something from the names of others; but both memory and imagination will fall so short of reality, that few will get to the end of the programme, and many stop at the first words.

The happiness of Bernard de Rohan and Isabel de Brienne, on the night after the interview which we have described in the last chapter, was of that bright and calm character which offers few points for the minds of others to rest upon. It was as a tranquil and a sunny sea bright and beautiful to look upon, but curled only by a light wind, agitated no more than to a gentle ripple. To the hospitality of the Maréchal de Vieilleville, Henry had committed them for the night, as, on account of some important business, the monarch confined himself to his own apartments; and Vieilleville himself, though somewhat formal and ceremonious withal, had a sufficient insight into the feelings which then moved them, to know that the best courtesy would be, to leave them as much as possible alone.

The King himself had fixed the day for their re-marriage,

and had placed but a week's interval between them and that ceremony which was to unite their fate beyond all question; and while they sat there, and conversed over the past or the future, while they told and heard all that had happened to each, scarcely a doubt of the happiness of the coming years crossed the mind of either. They were happy alike in their fate and their anticipations; and when Bernard de Rohan at length rose to leave the little party assembled in the rooms of Monsieur de Vieilleville, he promised himself and Isabel another joyful meeting on the morrow.

He intended to take his way towards the inn where he had alighted on his arrival, as all the rooms in the palace had been appropriated before his coming; but in the corridor just beyond the apartments of Monsieur de Vieilleville, he met a page, who put a billet into his hand. The young cavalier opened it, and advancing to a lantern which hung over one of the doors, he was about to read, when the door itself opened, and the Dauphin entered the corridor.*

Bernard de Rohan had seen enough to be aware that the handwriting was that of the Count de Meyrand, and he ceased reading somewhat suddenly.

"Ha! Monsieur de Rohan," said the Dauphin. "Well met! well met! I was seeking a companion for an adventure, and you are just the man. You have been lately in the land of song, too; so give me the aid of your good voice. But come with me—come with me. Here are lutes in this neighbouring chamber; and we may as well cast on some disguise."

"I follow your highness," replied Bernard de Rohan, partly divining what the young Prince wished; but turning to the page before he went, he said, in a low voice, "I will read the note hereafter, and send an answer without delay."

Thus saying, he followed the Dauphin through an anteroom, where a number of attendants were seated, who started up at the appearance of the Prince, and thence into a chamber beyond, which was vacant. Here Francis paused for a moment to explain his purpose.

"There are other bright eyes in this palace, besides those of your own fair lady, Monsieur de Rohan," he said. "In the farther wing, not to be seen by any but her own maids till her public appearance at the court to-morrow, is my promised bride, the fairest of the fair; and I would fain let her know, by some soft music beneath her window, that there is

* It may seem strange to speak of a lantern in the corridors of a royal palace; but such was the custom of the day.

one here prepared to love and cherish her. I was going by myself, for I must not trust any of my own people; but you are happily met with, and we will take our lutes and set out. Here!—here is a cloak to wrap you in, and there, on that table lies another lute; but I fear it is not in tune."

"I will soon remedy that," replied Bernard de Rohan, taking up the instrument and running his hand over the strings with some skill acquired in Italy. "I fear, however, I shall be but a poor performer, yet I will do my best."

The instrument was soon in tune, the cloaks thrown on; and passing by another way than that by which they came, Bernard de Rohan and his royal companion issued forth from the prince's apartments, and threading the long passages and dim corridors of the palace, arrived at a small door which was not shut, and gave them egress to the open air.

"Come hither, come hither," said the Dauphin, leading the way close to the wall of the palace. "The moon shines too brightly. Let us keep out of the light."

In those days there were some trees—old inhabitants of the forest—which actually approached within a few yards of the palace itself; and it so happened that the windows of that wing to which the Dauphin now conducted Bernard de Rohan were turned in the direction of the tall elms, as if for the very purpose of affording the tenant an opportunity of hearing a song of love sung under the wide-spreading branches. Leading the way thither, in the shadow cast by the building, the Prince took his place upon the soft green turf, which has now been long covered with heavy piles of stone; and leaning his back against one of the trees, he struck a few notes from the instrument he carried, and began to sing. It was soon evident that the song was heard; for the lights which had been observed in one of the chambers in the building were removed, as if to give no encouragement; but, at the same time, that sign of disapprobation was counterbalanced by the appearance of one or two female heads at the casement, the fair ladies to whom they belonged choosing to imagine that the darkness of the hour would prevent them from being seen.

The song of the Dauphin had not reached a close, however, when the figures of two other men were seen to issue forth from the shadow of one of the old towers, and approach rapidly towards the spot where the serenaders stood.

"What can be done?" exclaimed Francis, as his eye fell upon them. "My father will not easily forgive me; for he

bade me not to let any one know that the Princess has arrived at Fontainbleau."

"Perhaps they may not have any intention of molesting us," replied Bernard de Rohan: "let us walk slowly away. If they pursue us, I will turn and stop them."

The Dauphin adopted the suggestion at once, and walked on in a different direction from that of his own apartments, followed by Bernard de Rohan. The two strangers, however, pursued at a quick pace; and a moment after the young cavalier felt a smart blow upon his arm, while the voice of the Count de Meyrand was heard, exclaiming, "Now, sir! now! We are out of sight of the windows, and no place could be better—or are you flying like a coward?"

Bernard de Rohan turned sternly upon him. "You know, sir," he said, "that the commands of the King fix my sword to the scabbard, or I would have punished you long ere this."

"Brave men never seek excuses, sir; cowards are never without them," replied the Count; "but we know how to treat those who use them. Draw, sir! draw!" and at the same moment he again struck his adversary with the flat of his sword, which was already naked in his hand.

Bernard de Rohan could endure no more; his sword sprang from the sheath, and was in a moment crossed with that of the Count de Meynard. Both were well practised in the use of their weapon; but Bernard de Rohan, from the constant habit of warlike exercises, was decidedly superior in activity and precision. He parried the furious passes of his adversary without suffering the point ever to approach his bosom; and, in an effort which the Count made to overreach him by a feint, he took advantage of one careless moment to disarm him, and send his sword flying amongst the trees. The Count was brought on his knee by the effort he had made; but at that very instant there was a sound of many voices coming from the palace, and cries of "Where? where?"

Meyrand started upon his feet, gazed round with a rapid glance, as if for the person who had accompanied him thither; and then, with one look of rage and disappointment at Bernard de Rohan, plunged into the wood and disappeared. Bernard de Rohan, on his part, also turned to look for the Dauphin; but Francis, not having perceived who it was that approached when his companion was attacked by Meyrand, and thinking it merely some of his father's officers, had hastened onward at once towards the tall iron railings, or grille, which at that time separated the old gardens of the palace from the forest; and passing through a small gate, he had already entered the château itself on the other side.

A party of the guard were now approaching the spot where Bernard de Rohan stood in the clear moonlight. The night was so bright that, even if he had been able to escape, it was more than probable he was already recognised; but he felt no inclination to have recourse to flight, and calmly replacing his sword in the scabbard, he advanced in the direct line of the persons who were approaching, as if either to meet them or to re-enter the palace. The moment he came up, however, he was seized by the archers of the guard, who, though a somewhat unruly body themselves, were very zealous in preventing any one else from infringing the laws regarding the royal habitation.

"Swords drawn within the precincts of the palace!" cried one.

"Fetch the provost!" exclaimed another.

"Let me pass! let me pass! cried a third, who proved to be a lieutenant of the guard. "How now, Monsieur le Baron de Rohan?" he said. "You have been found with your sword drawn within the precincts of the king's hotel: do you not know that such is a great crime?"

"To draw one's sword willingly, my good friend, is a great crime," replied Bernard de Rohan, "but not to defend one's life when attacked. I was followed hither this moment, struck, and assailed sword in hand by a man whom I have just disarmed. You will find his sword somewhere under the trees there. There is no crime, I suppose, in my having defended my own life."

"Run and seek for the sword he speaks of," said the lieutenant, in the quick and imperative tone given by a little brief authority. "Pray Monsieur de Rohan, what were you doing here at this hour of the night?"

"As I cannot conceive that there can be any crime in my being out in the forest on a moonlight night," the young cavalier replied, "I do not feel myself, bound, sir, to give you any account of my conduct in that respect, nor do I see what you have to do with it."

"Your pardon, good sir, your pardon," replied the lieutenant; "we have everything in the world to do with it, as we have the King's own especial orders to keep a strict watch and guard round this quarter of the palace during the whole night. Doubtless his majesty was informed of some evil intentions, otherwise he would not have given particular orders on the present occasion.

"Be so good, my friend," said Bernard de Rohan, turning to one of the archers, "as to take your hand from my shoulder, for I am not accustomed to bear any one's hands

upon me patiently, and have a way of removing unpleasant things that may not be agreeable to you.—Under the circumstances you have mentioned," he continued, again addressing the lieutenant, "and as I have been forced undoubtedly to draw my sword in my own defence within these precincts, it may be as well if we go immediately to the presence of his majesty himself, that I may explain to him the whole matter."

"It is impossible you can do so to-night, sir," replied the lieutenant of the guard, very well pleased to make his authority felt: "the King has gone to rest, and my duty is straightforward. I have no business to trouble his majesty upon the subject at all. You must deal with the prévôt de l'hôtel, Monsieur de Rohan, and to him you can tell what tale you like."

"I shall certainly tell none but the true one, sir," replied Bernard de Rohan; "and pray where is the prévôt to be found, that the business may be settled at once?"

"Oh, that I cannot tell," answered the lieutenant, in a dry tone. "We shall doubtless find him to-morrow morning; for it is no reason why we should disturb anybody's rest that you choose to walk out by moonlight. In the meantime, you will be pleased to take up your abode in the inner guard-room; and though I fancy I ought to require you to give up your sword, I shall content myself with putting a sentinel at the door, if you will pledge me your word not to make your escape."

"That of course I will do, sir," replied Bernard de Rohan. "I am always ready and willing to submit to lawful authority; and as I doubt not that, under the circumstances, you are perfectly justified in what you do, I shall make no resistance, nor any attempt to evade the restraint you think necessary to impose."

"Ay, that is speaking like a reasonable gentleman, now," said the lieutenant, a good deal mollified. "Come, we will walk on together, sir. Ha! is that the sword, Fauchamp? A costly weapon, upon my life! Morbleu! The hilt is all gold and jewels. It will be long ere it fits its owner's hand again;" and evidently taking possession of the Count de Meyrand's sword as his own property, the worthy lieutenant led the way into the palace, and consigned his prisoner to a small chamber within the guard-room, where were a bed, a table, and a chair. A sentinel was ordered to stand at the door, though there was no exit whatsoever, but through the chamber in which all the guard on duty passed the night;

and the only sign of civility which the lieutenant thought fit to show, was to order a lamp to be given to his prisoner, and to ask if he could do anything for him.

"Merely," replied Bernard de Rohan, "to send two messages for me, one to the inn called the Sceptre, in the town, where my people, who have not yet had their master amongst them four-and-twenty hours, are waiting my return from the palace. Let them know that I remain here to-night. The other message I wish you to despatch is to his highness the Dauphin, telling him where I am, and on what account."

"We cannot disturb him, sir," replied the lieutenant, inclined to be a little more civil, but still somewhat harsh and unyielding by nature. "To-morrow morning we can send your message."

"The Dauphin has not yet gone to bed," replied Bernard de Rohan: "I saw him not long ago, and take the responsibility of the act upon myself."

"Well, sir," replied the officer; "so be it, then. It shall be done." Thus saying, he left the room, and closed the door.

Bernard de Rohan sat himself down at the table, and leaning his head upon his hand, mused over the strange fate which seemed to dog his footsteps ever since his return to France. On the present occasion, however, his countenance bore a smile; for he did not consider the circumstances in which he was placed as involving any serious danger, or menacing anything more, indeed, than a little temporary discomfort and annoyance. He had, in fact, only sent to the Dauphin, in order to ascertain what the Prince's wishes were, and whether he might mention, on the succeeding day, the cause of his having been out in the forest at that hour of night.

He had not to wait long ere the Prince appeared, with a flushed cheek, and a good deal of anxiety in his countenance.

"What is all this, Monsieur de Rohan?" he said. "I shall be deeply grieved, indeed, if, after the strong manner in which Monsieur de Brissac wrote to me concerning you, and with all the causes which—as I told you yesterday, when I saw you on your first arrival—that I have to esteem you, and to serve you—I shall be bitterly grieved, I say, if I have led you into any misfortune such as now seems to have fallen upon you."

Bernard de Rohan, however, treated the matter lightly. "I thank your highness much," he said, "for your good opinion, and deeply grateful am I to Brissac for writing so

frequently both to you and the Duchess de Valentinois, to interest you in my favour; but there is nothing in my present case, I trust, to deserve any apprehension."

"But you should not have drawn upon the people who followed us," said the Dauphin, "even if they had attempted to seize me. They would have soon recognised me."

"Nay, my lord," replied Bernard de Rohan, "I did not draw upon them, except in self-defence; nor were they the people you suppose. It would seem that the Count de Meyrand, and some other person, watched us from the palace and followed us. When I turned round, I found him with his sword drawn upon me. I bade him recollect the King's commands, and said all I could to stop him; but he struck me twice, and was deaf to all reason, so that I was forced to draw in my own defence. I disarmed him, but did not hurt him; and he fled, upon the guard coming up. This I will explain to the King to-morrow, and I think your royal father will hold me free from all blame."

"Oh, beyond all doubt," replied the Dauphin, "though there may be need of some proof."

"The guard have got his sword," replied Bernard de Rohan. "It is richly ornamented, it seems, and will soon be recognised. That will be proof enough, surely."

"I should think so," replied the Dauphin. "I could have wished, indeed, that there had been no need for mentioning me in the matter, but, however ——"

"There is no need, my lord," replied Bernard de Rohan: "it will only be necessary for me to say, if asked why I was there, that I went forth to give a serenade to a fair lady. I dare say the lute which I threw down when they attacked me has been found, which will prove the truth of the tale; and I need neither say to what lady the serenade was to be addressed, nor who was my companion by the way."

The countenance of the Dauphin cleared up. "Excellent!" he said—"excellent! You know how strict my father's ideas of obedience are; and as you are well aware, De Rohan, now that our fair friend the Duchess is not so loving as she was towards the Guises, there are all sorts of intrigues going forward, which my hapless serenade might embarrass. Such were my reasons for not wishing it known. But I will ask if they have found the lute; and although I fear you must endure one night's imprisonment for my sake, I will take care it shall not be passed in such a filthy den as this, filled with the stale fumes of wine and ill-trimmed lamps.—Ha! come in here, master lieutenant," he added, opening the

door: "have your people found a lute belonging to Monsieur de Rohan?"

"Yes, your highness," replied the lieutenant, with a profound inclination; "that is to say, a lute was found near the spot where he was arrested."

"Keep it, and the sword you found also," said the Dauphin: "they must be shown to the King to-morrow. In the meantime, you must not think of detaining a gentleman of Monsieur de Rohan's rank in such a chamber as this. He has committed no offence."

"He was found with a drawn sword, your royal highness," replied the lieutenant, anxious to justify himself.

"And so are my page and my armorer every day," cried the Dauphin. "However, sir, I do not seek to interfere with the execution of your duties; I merely require you to place Monsieur de Rohan in a more commodious apartment, till those who are competent decide whether he have committed any offence or not."

"There is none other that I know of vacant in the palace, my lord," replied the lieutenant, "at least, none at my disposal."

"Then I will put one at your disposal," rejoined the Dauphin. "In my apartments there is the cabinet in the west tower, where my chief page sleeps: the page must sleep with his brother to-night, and Monsieur de Rohan have that room. You can put a guard at the door, if you please."

"I would not so far presume, your highness," said the lieutenant; "but you know when the Marquis de Palluprat was arrested, and the lieutenant of the guard suffered him ——"

"It matters not, it matters not," replied the Dauphin: "you may put a guard, if you please. Come, De Rohan, follow me;" and thus saying, he opened the door, and went out, accompanied by the Baron de Rohan, and followed by the lieutenant of the guard and a sentinel.

The chamber to which the Prince conducted the young cavalier was certainly much more convenient and comfortable in every respect than that which they had just quitted; and bidding the kind-hearted Prince farewell, Bernard de Rohan, who, as we have more than once said, had little imagination for personal dangers and risks, threw off his clothes, cast himself down on the bed, and after thinking awhile over his late interview with Isabel de Brienne, fell into a tranquil slumber, forgetful of all that was disagreeable in the events of the evening.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Nearly two hours after the events had occurred which we have described in the last chapter, the hostess of the auberge called the *Sceptre*, in the town of Fontainbleau, started up, from a conversation in which she was engaged with a man dressed in a clerical habit, and exclaiming, "There they are at the door!" snatched from the table a bottle of fine wine, which, about ten years before, had swelled out the grapes some twenty miles above Lyons, and quitted the small parlour on the ground floor in which she had been sitting. The priest rubbed his eyes, and followed her; and in a moment after the same chamber was tenanted by two gentlemen, with whom we have more particularly to do.

"All is lost by that unfortunate lunge!" exclaimed the Count de Meyrand, casting himself heavily into a seat as he entered. "My foot slipped, or my hand shook, or my eyesight failed me, or some folly, I know not what. But all is lost, evidently—all is lost—love, and revenge, and all!"

"Nay, you are soon disheartened!" said the Lord of Masseran. "For a brave man, and one who dares meddle with dangerous things, without pausing or pondering, like a goldsmith, to weigh a grain or two less here and there, you are soon disheartened, indeed!—too soon for a man who has staked all upon this chance, and who, by the event of the next hour, may be ruined for life."

"Nay, nay, Monsieur de Masseran," replied the Count, whose pride would not let him hear another say what he would say himself; "ruined for life I cannot be. You much mistake, if you think that any King can deal with a French noble as sovereigns and emperors can deal with petty Italian lords. The King's favour may be lost! That cannot be helped; but farther than that I am not injured."

"Good sooth," replied the Lord of Masseran, "I thought the matter was much worse than that. I thought that the King's favour once gone for ever, all chance of obtaining her you love was gone also; for we may devise schemes to carry her off—to take her to other lands—to use force or stratagem, or wit or persuasion, all in vain. Out of those dark walls you can never get her, but with her own and with the King's consent. Then, again, you drew your sword within the precincts of the palace, which brings you in danger of the good prévôt, who is a man somewhat fond of sharp

knives. I have heard, and I know that such things as forfeitures have taken place for acts not very dissimilar."

The Count looked gloomily down upon the table, and clasped his hands so tight together that the fingers became white.

"Am I not right?" demanded the Lord of Masseran—"am I not right in saying, that on the next step depends your utter ruin or salvation?"

"By Heaven!" exclaimed the Count de Meyrand, "if my ruin comes, yours shall go along with it, Lord of Masseran! What avails it to tell me what I pointed out before, that all is lost—love, ambition, revenge? What avails it to repeat all this, and, like some drivelling grandmother, to dwell upon evils when they are self-evident, without suggesting a means either of fleeing from the consequences or remedying what is gone amiss? What is your suggestion?—Where is your resource?—What is to be done?—If you have nothing to propose, be silent, or leave me."

Such, however, was not at all the purpose of the Lord of Masseran, who, in truth, had something to propose, but still found no small enjoyment in seeing his confederate stripped of all his airs of indifference and superiority, and giving himself up to passion and vehement disappointment.

"Is this the calm, cool, reasoning Count de Meyrand?" he said, looking on him with one of his serpent glances. "Is this the calculating, stratagetic Frenchman, whose resources seemed unfailing and schemes innumerable? Nay, nay, rise not up with such a flaming brow! You forget your sword is gone; so do not strive to grasp the hilt!"

"Curses on it!" exclaimed the Count, casting himself down on the seat, and striking the table vehemently with his clenched fist—"curses on it! or rather on this bungling hand!"

"Well, well," said the Lord of Masseran; "hear what I have to propose, and see whether it may suit your lordly nature. It is a bold measure, but we have none but bold measures left This business must soon be known. You cannot escape far enough, ere it be public, to put yourself out of the risk of danger. The king can reach you wherever you may be. If you grant these premises, I will go on and show you how—by risking nothing farther than is already risked—you may perchance turn aside the blow from yourself, and at all events gain a great and important advantage over your rival."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Count, musing—"indeed!—

The way must be clear and straightforward, however, my good lord. I know not how, or why, but it seems to me that crooked paths do not prove successful with me.—What is it that you have to propose, and what to promise?"

"I will not promise you," replied the Lord of Masseran, "that you will ever obtain the hand of the lady,—at all events, for some years; for were I to promise it, I should be deceiving you, which, notwithstanding your suspicions, I do not seek to do. But I will promise you—and you shall see how, in a moment—that your rival shall never obtain her hand either."

"How so? how so?" exclaimed the Count, starting up and gazing eagerly in his companion's face. "That were, indeed, worth striving for at any risk. Revenge! revenge!—Revenge would then be mine; and I would give this right hand up to-morrow to be struck off by a butcher's knife, in order to see him withering day by day under love, disappointment, and despair—How so?—But it is impossible!"

"Not only perfectly possible, but perfectly easy," replied the Lord of Masseran, "and with not a greater degree of risk than you run by any other course you can pursue."

"I fear not risks!" exclaimed the Count. "Speak, speak! What would you have me do?"

"Simply this," replied his companion. "At the hour of the King's rising to-morrow, present yourself at the door of his chamber, and beseech admittance on business of importance. To no nobleman of your rank is it refused at that hour. Cast yourself at his feet. Tell him in humble terms that you come to offer him your head. Power always loves the exaggeration of submission. Then, when he asks your meaning, say, that notwithstanding his orders, your anger, indignation, and jealousy, had caused you to call the Baron de Rohan to the field. Doubtless he will eagerly inquire the result, supposing by your coming that you have killed your adversary. Then tell him, that in going beyond the precincts of the palace, in order to settle the affair, you two had drawn upon each other, when the guard coming up, you had been accidentally disarmed and escaped."

"It may be as well, indeed, to do so," said the Count, in a disappointed tone; "because, to tell the offence first oneself, is the best way to deal with Henry; but, except in producing some mitigation of his anger for this offence, I see not what good it will do. I see not how it will prevent this fatal marriage that they are hurrying on."

"I will tell you how," replied the Lord of Masseran. "In

one moment I will tell you how. Henry, to prevent this event from taking place, has pledged his honour to Bernard de Rohan, that if, on any provocation, he draws his sword upon you, he shall never obtain the hand of Isabel de Brienne, so long as Henry the Second is King of France. The page who announced to the King that you were in waiting, told me the very words the monarch used, for he heard them, and thought he was doing good service in noising it about, because I pretended to be very anxious lest an encounter should take place. Thus the King's word is pledged, and he will sooner die than break it, if you can but prove to him that your meeting of last night was by appointment. If you cannot do that, and show that De Rohan was as ready as yourself, the King may get over it as a chance encounter, or pardon it on the plea that your enemy did it in self-defence. It is easy to say that he first drew his sword on you."

"But that is false!" said the Count de Meyrand. "It is a downright lie!"

"False!" exclaimed the Lord of Masseran, with a shrill mocking laugh. "A lie!—Why is this the first falsehood we have got over in the matter? I thought the general principle on which we acted was, that everything is fair in love and war. But if you are scrupulous, good Count—if your stomach turns at one small falsehood more ——"

"But this is so direct!" cried the Count—"and yet it must be done. We must leave no part of this last point doubtful or difficult. You, Masseran, however, must lie too."

"Oh, I will lie most zealously," replied the Marquis, without the least hesitation. "I hold a lie well told to be even more virtuous and honourable than truth, when it is really necessary and justified by expediency. What would kings, courtiers, politicians, or priests be without a lie? I am not so weak a dabbler as to be frightened from my purpose by a bad name given to a good thing! What is the lie you want? I will answer for it, I tell it well."

"Doubtless!" replied the Count de Meyrand, with a sneer, from which he could not refrain even then. "However, you must swear that you saw the challenge which I sent him."

"Oh, but you did send him a challenge, I know," replied the other; "so I can well swear that I saw it. That is but half a lie," he added, in a tone of disappointment. "But why does your brow become cloudy again? Is there any new scruple suggests itself to your delicate mind?"

"No," answered the Count; "but there is a new doubt. Masseran, your plan of vowing that he drew on me will not do!—You and I, in our eagerness, have both forgotten that he was not alone. Did not the boy who carried my cartel, tell us that he was with the Dauphin, and would send an answer? and was not the youth who accompanied him when we came up, exactly of the height and air of Francis himself?"

"Exactly," answered the Savoyard, coolly—"exactly: because, it was himself. But, my good Count, though quite as eager in this business, I am not quite so agitated in it, as the calm, indifferent Count de Meyrand; and I will tell you something that you did not perceive. The Dauphin never turned his head, but hastened away with all speed, through the grille into the gardens. He and his companion were upon some work that Francis did not choose to be caught in performing. It might be making love to a soubrette, or it might be stealing apples, or any other thing to which boys are given; but he ran away as soon as we came up, and can no more tell which drew first upon the other than if he had been in his bed asleep."

"That is fortunate," said the Count, more calmly; "and your project shall be followed, my good friend. But let us not be taken by surprise on any point. Early to-morrow we must gain intelligence of all that has passed since this affair took place—what has become of De Rohan—whether it was really the guard that came up—everything, in short."

As he spoke, he pressed his hand upon his brow, as if it ached; and the Lord of Masseran replied, "Leave that to me; and get you to rest, that your thoughts may be clear and calm. I will see some of the Baron's servants by daylight to-morrow, and discover everything. Before the King's rising, I will tell you all.—But now to bed—I will back to the palace; so good night."

Thus saying, he left him, and walked out into the air, but returned not to the palace at once, pacing slowly up and down on the shaded side of the street, as if the very moonlight were too bright to shine upon his thoughts.

"He is weak and wavering," said the Lord of Masseran to himself, thinking of the Count de Meyrand—"he is weak and wavering. I must not trust him with anything great; but there is still some pleasure in making these daring, vain, chattering Frenchmen outwit each other, and bring about their own ruin, while they are plotting skilfully against others. Ha, ha! Now if this hound follows the scent truly, he will ruin all his own hopes for ever, as well as those of

that keen, harsh soldier. That once done, commend me the girl to a nunnery, and the fortune falls in, to our fair and obedient lady. I wish my messengers from the south would arrive. They might have been here this morning early. I fear something has gone wrong—whether they have not found the youth?—or he have proved refractory?"—

In such pleasant speculations as these, the Lord of Masseran occupied about half an hour. I have often thought, when looking at the motions of a serpent—the slow gliding tortuous way in which it advances—the seeming slumber in which it sometimes lies waiting for its prey—the sudden writhing dart with which it rushes upon its enemy, or its food—together with the quiet dull sort of security which is apparent in its horny eye—I have often thought, that I discovered a degree of pride and self-satisfaction in its wily and silent skill.

The same sort of serpent pride filled the heart of the Lord of Masseran, and I believe has filled the heart of many another artful man, in deceit and fraud. While the Count de Meyrand, who was in that most miserable of all miserable states—unconfirmed, unhardened villany, lay tossing, feverish and restless, on the bed of care and self-reproach—the Lord of Masseran slept calmly and soundly during the hours he gave to rest, and woke at the break of day with a mind clear and refreshed, to pursue, without scruple, fear, or hesitation, the same dark schemes into which, as we have seen, he had plunged. We say without fear; for though there had been difficulties, obstacles, and dangers from time to time, to ward off, and to encounter, sufficient to give him momentary alarm, yet the ease with which he had surmounted them, by playing off one person against another, had served to give him perfect reliance in his own powers. He hastened to dress himself, then, in order to ascertain exactly what had followed the encounter of the preceding night, and had already given directions to an attendant to seek one of the followers of the Baron de Rohan, when another servant entered, leading the way before a man booted and spurred, and dusty with rapid travelling.

We have seen that to those towards whom he judged it not necessary to assume a calm and insinuating air, the Lord of Masseran could be fierce, haughty, and harsh, and he instantly turned upon the courier who entered, with an angry and menacing air, saying, "How is it, Geronimo, that you have kept me waiting a whole day? You should have been here yesterday morning."

"I thought it best, my lord," replied the man, in a humble tone, "as I have news of great importance to tell you—I thought it best not to come away, with any part of my story imperfect; and I spent the whole of one day making inquiries in the neighbourhood of Cerdon. But I cannot speak plainly, till you can hear me alone."

"Leave the room, leave the room!" said the Lord of Masseran, addressing the other servants, and in an instant the chamber was cleared, the door shut, and the tapestry drawn over it.

The two attendants, one of whom had been aiding his lord in dressing, when the other had entered showing Geronimo the way, now remained together in the little antechamber. They kept at a respectful distance from the door which led into their lord's apartment, knowing his habits of suspicion and his dislike of being listened to; but they themselves talked together in low tones, seated on the coffer in the window. The one asked the other what tidings Geronimo brought from Savoy: the other replied that Geronimo had not been to Savoy, for he had only gone to carry a message to Count Henry: what news had been brought back the man declared he could not say, but, from a few words that had passed, he fancied it was something Geronimo thought would please their master mightily.

This anticipation, however, seemed by no means to be just, for in about twenty minutes, the Lord of Masseran opened the door suddenly, without the least noise announcing that he was about to do so; and looking sharply round the room, as if to see that nobody had been near the door, he said, with a heavy, lowering, and somewhat anxious brow, "Has none of Monsieur de Rohan's servants been found? Go and see—quick, go and see."

Both the servants ran out at once, and in about five minutes one of them returned, bringing with him the servant of Bernard de Rohan, whom we have before mentioned, called Pierre Millort. The latter was instantly admitted to the chamber of the Savoyard nobleman, and remained there for some minutes alone with the Lord of Masseran, Geronimo having come out and taken his station in the anteroom. Whatever took place within, profound stillness reigned in the outer chamber; for the valet durst ask no questions, and Geronimo was as silent as the grave; stopping all inquiry by a declaration that his lord had strictly forbidden him to mention the tidings to any one, till he himself thought fit to disclose them. At length Bernard's servant came forth and

went his way, replying to some words the Lord of Masseran addressed to him, "I wont fail to tell my lord, sir, how kind you have been."

The Savoyard closed the door, and walked two or three times up and down the room with a dark and sneering smile upon his countenance, pausing every five or ten steps, and thinking deeply. At length, after a longer pause than usual, he burst out into a laugh, exclaiming, "What so natural? They quarrelled on the road, fought, and he was killed!—Now, then, the whole is at an end for ever."

This conclusion seemed to be perfectly satisfactory to him; he called in his servant again, concluded the process of dressing, and then hurried forth towards the inn to seek the Count de Meyrand. When he arrived there, however, he found that Meyrand, after passing a sleepless night, had risen early, and, impatient of delay, had gone at once to the palace.

"By Heaven," exclaimed the Lord of Masseran, "he may ruin all, with his weak impetuosity; but the King most likely has not risen yet. I must speed back and see."

Thus saying, he turned his steps without a moment's delay towards the palace, and sought the antechamber of the king's apartments. He found nobody there, however, but ushers and other ordinary attendants; and, on inquiry as to whether the King had risen, he was answered in the affirmative, the page adding, that his majesty was engaged in business of importance with the Count de Meyrand. The Lord of Masseran turned away, muttering to himself, "Well, after all, the best and surest card is in my own hand. He cannot do much harm."

At that moment a gentleman issued forth from the King's chamber, and as soon as he saw him, exclaimed, "Ha! Monsieur de Masseran, I was coming to seek you! His majesty requires your presence."

CHAPTER XXIX.

The custom of the kings of France, from the time of Charlemagne down to the last of the Capets, to receive various members of their court while they were rising and dressing in the morning, is so well known that we need scarcely tell the public that it did exist. On the present occasion, however, Henry, not well satisfied with the conduct of the Count

of Meyrand, and wishing to mark his displeasure, had kept him waiting in the antechamber for some time till he was nearly dressed. The Count was then admitted, and the pale, anxious, and agitated countenance that he bore, his troubled air, so unlike his usual demeanour, and especially so unlike his demeanour of the day before—somewhat moved the compassion of the kind-hearted King; and he thought, "After all, this man has some grace, and repents of the insolent conduct into which he was hurried yesterday."

"I come, sire," said the Count de Meyrand, advancing towards the King, "to put my life at your disposal. I have committed an act which I acknowledge to be perfectly inexcusable; and, whatever may be your majesty's decision, I shall bow to it with more humility and contrition than I displayed yesterday, when my mind was, I confess, in a state bordering on frenzy; and indeed, to temporary madness alone, can I attribute my whole conduct during that day."

The King's brow contracted again, but before he could reply, an attendant appeared, saying, "The prévôt de l'hôtel, sire, is without, desiring earnestly to speak to your majesty."

"Bid him enter," said the King, in a stern tone; and then, turning towards the Count, he added, "If I interpret your words rightly, Monsieur de Meyrand, I shall have need of him before you quit me. Now, prévôt, what is it that you want?"

"I wished to know your majesty's will," replied the prévôt, with a low inclination, "as to what is to be done regarding the Baron de Rohan, who was taken by the guard last night, with his sword drawn, near the grille enclosing the gardens. It is held to be within the precincts of the palace, sire, though I confess the matter may be doubtful, and probably Monsieur de Rohan was not aware that it is so."

"Bring him hither immediately," replied the King. "We have more important questions to settle with Monsieur de Rohan than that, I think. An error we can pardon: wilful disobedience must be punished, or else the kingly power is intrusted to us in vain. This, Monsieur de Meyrand," he continued, while the prévôt retired—"this, I naturally suppose, is connected with the matter which brought you hither: is it not so?"

"Doubtless it is, sire," replied the Count. "I do confess that, moved by jealousy, indignation, and despair, I wrote to Monsieur de Rohan last night, calling upon him to meet me. He came forth for that purpose, I having no intention, indeed,

of drawing my sword within the well-known precincts of your royal residence." He said it without faltering or hesitation, so familiar will a direct falsehood, shuddered at at first, become to a man's mind by one single night of evil consideration. "He drew upon me, however," continued the Count; "and, taken by surprise, as well as hearing the guard coming near, I suffered myself to be disarmed."

"There was no blood spilt?" demanded the King.

"None, sire," answered the Count. "But still I own my fault while I regret it, and acknowledge that it was my intention to carry the matter to the last extreme."

"There is some virtue in sincerity, at least," replied the King, after musing for a moment; "but here comes Monsieur de Rohan. Gentlemen, stand aside. Monsieur de Brèzé put forward that chair, if you please. Now let these two rivals stand before me. What have you to say for yourself, Monsieur Bernard de Rohan, first, for disobeying my most strict commands, and, secondly, for drawing your sword within the precincts of the palace?"

"To both, sire," replied Bernard de Rohan, calmly and straightforwardly, "to both I have the same answer to make, that I did not draw my sword willingly, nor till I was compelled to do so in defence of my own life as well as my own honour. My honour I could well trust in your majesty's hands: but my life, as you were not there to defend it, I was bound to defend myself."

"But the Count de Meyrand, here," replied the King—"the Count de Meyrand, here, informs me that, while going forward to a more convenient and lawful place for such encounters, you drew your sword upon him."

"This, sire," replied Bernard de Rohan, in a calm, steady, and determined voice, and at the same time fixing his eyes upon the countenance of Meyrand, which was very pale—"this assertion of Adrian de Meyrand is, like the whole of his life, a lie."

"You hear," said the King, turning to the Count de Meyrand. "What proofs can you give of your assertion?"

"Every proof, sire," replied the Count. "Will Monsieur de Rohan deny that he received my cartel? Will he deny that he came out to meet me?"

"The latter I will certainly deny," replied Bernard de Rohan. "In regard to the cartel, sire," he continued, turning to the King, "I certainly did receive a note last night from Monsieur de Meyrand—sent, not by any French gentleman, but by a simple page. I opened it, but scarcely saw more

than the first word, when his highness the Dauphin coming up, and engaging me in conversation, I told the page that I would send an answer; and I have never thought of the paper since. It is here, sire," and he placed it in the King's hand. "I then ventured to go out," he continued, "taking with me an instrument of music lent by his highness the Dauphin, in order to give a serenade, in the Venetian fashion, to a fair lady now in the palace, when I was overtaken by Monsieur de Meyrand and another person, the Lord of Masseran, I think——"

The Count de Meyrand nodded his head in sign of affirmation; and the King, turning round to one of the gentlemen near, said, "Summon the Lord of Masseran, Villeblanche, to be here immediately.—Go on, Monsieur de Rohan."

"The Count, when I first saw him," Bernard de Rohan proceeded, "had his sword drawn. The first notice I had of his presence was a blow from the flat side of the weapon; and when, remonstrating with him, I bade him recollect your majesty's injunctions, he called me coward, used the most insulting language, struck me again, and compelled me to draw in my own defence."

"I hope you are dealing with me sincerely, Monsieur de Rohan," said the King: "in this very note which you have put into my hand, there is an invitation to meet the Count de Meyrand with a hostile purpose at the very spot where I understand you were found.—Was there any instrument of music discovered?" he continued, turning to the prévôt.

"Yes, sire," replied the prévôt, "a lute was found near the spot where the Baron stood."

"A mere pretext, sire," said the Count; "but here is my Lord of Masseran—let him speak to what he saw."

"Now, sir," said the King, turning to the Lord of Masseran, "I have to request that you will detail, without communication with any one here present, what you witnessed between these two gentlemen last night. Here is a strange discrepancy in their statements. Relate, if you please, all that took place."

The reply of the Lord of Masseran was as artful as it could possibly be. "You take me quite by surprise, sire," he said; "for I came upon a matter totally different, an event sad and terrible, which it is my painful task to disclose to your majesty, and which really quite bewilders me—but I will answer your questions first, sire. Knowing that the noble Count de Meyrand had sent a cartel to Monsieur de Rohan, I accompanied the Count towards the spot where he had ap-

pointed to meet his adversary, for the purpose of going farther into the forest and settling their differences, wherever they could find an open space beyond the precincts with fair ground and clear moonlight. Almost as soon as we were out of the palace, we saw Monsieur de Rohan before us, going towards the spot; and Monsieur de Meyrand took a step forward to speak with him."

"What did he say?" demanded the King.

"I was a step or two behind," said the Lord of Masseran, "so that I did not catch the exact words; but I suppose he gave him good night, or exchanged with him some of those ordinary courtesies which gentlemen in such situations sweetly offer to each other before they cut one another's throats. The moment after, Monsieur de Rohan drew; and, before I had time to represent that we were in the precincts of the palace, Monsieur de Meyrand had drawn also."

The Count had watched him with a strong inclination to smile, notwithstanding all the agitation he did really feel, at the honest, straightforward, truth-like air with which the Lord of Masseran told his story.

The King, however, interrupted it in this part to ask, "Are you sure, my Lord of Masseran, that the Baron de Rohan was the first to draw his sword?"

"Sire," replied the Lord of Masseran, solemnly, "I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that he was."

"What say you now, Monsieur de Rohan?" said the King.

"Simply this, sire," replied Bernard de Rohan, indignant at the falsehood, "that every word I have spoken to your majesty is the plain truth; and let me beg you to call to your recollection that no one, either for the inducements of policy, ay, or even to deceive an enemy in the field—though both in cabinets and camps such things are held as no dishonour—has known me ever to utter one falsehood; that no light excuse, even to free me from a troublesome friend; no deceitful cause assigned, to evade doing a service; no braggart boast, or vain false word of any kind, has ever been known upon my lips! Then let me call your attention to the fact, that these charges are brought by two men, who have already, for the same purpose at which they are aiming now, contrived the most false, villanous, and deceitful schemes, and have not scrupled—the one, who was once a French gentleman, and the other, who was, and ever has been, a base miscreant—to violate every principle of truth. I refer, sire, to the character of this Italian witness as sent to you by the Maréchal de Brissac; and, putting his testimony

out of the question, I say that my word against that of the Count de Meyrand must weigh down the scale, and send his up to the beam."

"What you say is so far true," replied the king. "You have a name for truth, Monsieur de Rohan, which goes some way, but cannot do everything against direct, and evidently unpremeditated testimony. I told you yesterday that if, on any provocation whatsoever, you drew your sword upon the Count de Meyrand, you should be punished in the way which you recollect I mentioned; and I feel strongly disposed to pronounce that sentence upon you at once."

"Sire," replied Bernard de Rohan, "you would do me cruel wrong."

"One word more, Monsieur de Masseran," said the King. "Think you it possible, from what you saw, that Monsieur de Rohan went out to give a serenade to Mademoiselle de Brienne?"

"Impossible, sire," replied the Lord of Masseran; "for he was quite at the other end of the palace, of which your majesty may easily satisfy yourself."

"Now, sir," said the monarch, turning to Bernard de Rohan, "have you aught to say why I should not at once pronounce the sentence I threatened against you?"

"Simply this, sire," replied Bernard de Rohan, "that I have a witness who can prove all the facts; but before I call upon him, I must have his permission to do so. I hope it can be obtained. I trust it can, but ——"

"This sounds like an evasion, sir," said the King, "yet ——"

"It is an evasion, sire," interrupted the Lord of Masseran, thinking that he perceived a wavering in the King's mind; "but let me tell Monsieur de Rohan, that even should your majesty's kindness and generosity suffer him to evade the punishment on the present occasion, I have a charge against him that he cannot evade; a charge deep, horrible, detestable, which brought me hither to you majesty in haste this morning."

"You must reserve it, sir," said the King, "till I have decided the matter before me; even then my time is, I fear, too short to attend to you for above a moment. With you, Monsieur de Meyrand, I shall deal at once. You have acknowledged that you sent this challenge. You, therefore, are the first aggressor, and I banish you from the court for ever. Retire to your own estates, keep yourself there quiet, and think well of every step you take; there will be an un-

slumbering eye upon you which you cannot escape. Keep yourself there, and never show yourself in my presence again. For you, Monsieur de Rohan, my sentence must be pronounced conditionally. If the tale that you have told be true, you could not well avoid defending your own life, and, therefore, I tell you that if you can prove you did not first draw your sword, by proofs that can admit of no doubt, I will annul your sentence; but till then I say that the hand of Isabel de Brienne shall never be yours, so long as I wear the crown of France. My word is said, and it shall be inviolable, upon my honour."

Bernard de Rohan bowed low, with some sadness upon his brow, but not exactly with despair. The Count de Meyrand, though his sentence was a bitter one, thought with feelings of consolation that he had ruined his rival. "He can never prove that," he thought, for the Dauphin's back was turned.

The only one who spoke was the Lord of Masseran. "Suffer him not to depart, I beseech you, sire," he said, seeing that Bernard de Rohan had taken a step back, as if to retire. "There is a charge against him to which all that has passed is as noon sunshine compared to midnight."

"What is it, sir?" said Henry, for the first time giving some attention to the Lord of Masseran's accusation. "With what do you charge him?"

"With the murder, sire," replied the Lord of Masseran—"with the deliberate murder of Henry Count of Brienne, the brother of her whom he pretends to love."

CHAPTER XXX.

A MURMUR of astonishment broke from the various persons assembled in the King's bedchamber at the charge so boldly made by the Lord of Masseran. The King himself drew back a step as if in horror, and paused a moment ere he asked any questions in explanation of what he heard; but surprise was perhaps more strikingly displayed in the countenances of the Count de Meyrand and Bernard de Rohan himself, than in any others that the room contained.

The King broke silence first, demanding, "Have you well considered what you say, my Lord of Masseran? The charge is so serious, and at the same time so improbable;

the crime is so utterly without any apparent motive; so contrary to the character of Monsieur de Rohan, and so incredible in his circumstances and situation, that I am compelled to ask you this question. Have you well considered what you say? Have you any strong evidence to support the charge, or do you make it merely upon suspicion?"

"I make it, sire, upon proof positive," replied the Lord of Masseran—"proof which leaves no doubt to my mind; which I think will be fully satisfactory to your majesty, and perfectly sufficient for the judges of the land."

"What do you say, Monsieur de Rohan?" demanded the King, turning towards him with a look, from which he could not banish, even yet, an expression of astonishment and horror—"what have you to say, sir, to this charge?"

"I have to say, sire," replied Bernard de Rohan, "simply that I am accused falsely of a great crime by a bad man. There is nothing else that I can say on the subject, not having the slightest idea of what can have suggested such a suspicion to the mind of this foreign calumniator."

"There is no calumny, sire—there is no suspicion," said the Lord of Masseran. "I am ready this moment to put an end to all such vain words by bringing forward the proofs in your majesty's presence, and then it will be seen who is the calumniator."

"This is too important an affair to be decided here," said the King. "Half an hour hence, in the great audience chamber, I will hear the whole. Prévôt, remove Monsieur de Rohan, and suffer him to hold communication with no one. Take him at once to the audience chamber. I will follow after."

The unfortunate young cavalier turned to depart under the guard of the prévôt, merely saying, "I trust to your majesty's sense of justice not to enter into the charge against me without my presence."

"You shall have all justice, Monsieur de Rohan," replied the King.—"My Lord of Masseran, Monsieur de Meyrand, leave me for the time. I will investigate this matter shortly."

Conscious innocence and a strong true heart did certainly afford Bernard de Rohan great support in this moment of difficulty and grief; but they could not remove a feeling of deep depression which had suddenly come over him, and which seemed to be, as it were, the substance of that melancholy whereof the shadow had fallen upon him on his first entrance into France. It appeared as if, at every step he

took forward, some fresh load was cast upon his head; as if, at every difficulty he surmounted, new and more terrible obstacles rose up before him. He quitted the King's apartment with a firm, slow step, and with an upright, though a frowning brow, but despondency was heavy at his heart; and while detained in the great audience chamber, with his arms crossed upon his chest, he waited the coming of the King, he felt that the Prince's appearance would be but the commencement of new sorrow and anguish to himself.

In the meantime, the Lord of Masseran and the Count de Meyrand, as if to enjoy their triumph, walked up and down at the other end of the hall, conversing rapidly and eagerly together, and from time to time turning a grave and somewhat scornful look towards the spot where their victim stood. To make the mortification the greater, too, numbers of the noblemen and gentlemen of the court looked in, and gazed upon him in silence from time to time, as the rumour spread through the palace; and then, to crown all, he heard the voice of Isabel herself, in tones which spoke evidently that she had heard the whole bitter tale, beseeching admittance to him she loved, and persevering in her request, though frequently denied by the guard at the door.

"Pray tell her, monsieur le prévôt," said Bernard de Rohan, with his heart wrung and aching, at the very sound of that sweet voice which was so dear to him—"pray tell her that if she were admitted, you could not let her speak to me. I will stand here while you go, without uttering a word to any one, upon my honour."

The prévôt hesitated for an instant, but then left his side, and spoke for a moment or two with Isabel at the door. She made no reply, and Bernard de Rohan thought that she had retired. But it was not so; for in about ten minutes the doors were thrown open by the ushers, with the announcement of "The King! the King!" and in an instant after, though Bernard de Rohan could not see what passed in the corridor beyond, he again heard Isabel's voice in the tones of entreaty, and it seemed to him that every now and then tears and sobs broke in upon utterance. Henry's voice replied, speaking to her evidently in a soothing tone, though the words he used could not be heard. At length it seemed that he moved on, saying, in a louder voice as he came forward, "Since you desire it, it shall be so, if it be needful to remove him from this place. Retire to the Queen's cabinet in the meanwhile. I will not deceive you, lady, though I think you are wrong."

The words were still upon his lips, as he entered the room, followed by a number of the nobles of the court, and accompanied by his second son Charles.

"Where is the Dauphin?" asked Bernard de Rohan of the prévôt, in a low tone, while Henry seated himself, and the gentlemen formed into a semicircle at the top of the room.

"He was sent by his majesty to Paris, at an early hour this morning," replied the prévôt, in the same low voice.

"My Lord of Masseran, Monsieur de Rohan, come forward," said the King, with an expression of much gloom and severity on his countenance; and, having spoken, he looked down on his footstool for a moment or two in silence, while the accuser and the accused approached nearer. Then raising his head with an air of much majesty, he addressed the Savoyard. "Monsieur de Masseran," he said, "before you speak one word more, let me give you a caution, and point out to you in what position you yourself stand; for in dealing an equal measure of justice to all, I have to recollect what motives may exist in your peculiar situation to influence your conduct towards the person whom you now accuse. I have thought over the whole circumstances which are already known, and I find that there is a strong enmity previously existing, on your part, towards the Baron de Rohan. I find, in the first place,—for these things must now be openly declared,—that some two years ago Monsieur de Rohan, then serving with great distinction in Italy, discovered some correspondence between yourself, professing to be an adherent of France, and our enemy, Philip King of Spain. This he laid before the Maréchal de Brissac, believing it to be of a treasonable kind. You, sir, explained away the meaning of that correspondence, but still suspicions have been entertained of you; and I am informed by the Maréchal de Brissac himself, that he found it needful, not many weeks ago, to send Monsieur de Rohan to you with an intimation, that if you did not cease the correspondence which you held with the enemies of France, he should be obliged to occupy your territories on both sides of the mountains, and put you under personal restraint. On this occasion you avoided seeing Monsieur de Rohan; laid, it would appear, a trap for him; arrested him immediately after a clandestine marriage with Mademoiselle de Brienne, and threw him into a dungeon. The tower above that dungeon was set on fire—I trust, accidentally—and that which was supposed to have caused the death of Monsieur de Rohan, it would seem, enabled him to escape. He appeared here at court, frus-

trated all your designs of wedding your lady's daughter to the Count de Meyrand, and now you suddenly bring a charge against him of having murdered the young Count of Brienne. Now, let me ask you, is not this accusation very like a part of an arranged system? At all events, one thing is made clear, which is, that you have long entertained strong and bitter enmity towards the Baron de Rohan, and, therefore, your charge loses much force from the apparent motive by which you are actuated. Consider this well, and take care what you do; for be sure, that if you persevere in doing wrong, the matter shall be now investigated to the very bottom."

"I desire no better, sire," replied the Lord of Masseran. "My enmity—perhaps I may call it my antipathy—to Monsieur de Rohan I wish in no degree to conceal. I love him not, I never have loved him. Take my accusation, therefore, at no more than it is worth; but I make that accusation not lightly nor unjustly. The facts have so lately come to my knowledge, that I have had no time to form or fabricate a tale, to seek for evidence, or devise plans of turning the death of this poor youth to the purposes of my revenge. I accuse this gentleman, Bernard de Rohan, of having murdered, in cold blood, his friend, Henry of Brienne, in the forest which extends between the small village of Leissard and the river Ain, as near as I can calculate, some ten days ago; but for all the small particulars I must refer your majesty to those from whom I myself have received the information. I have not yet had space to make myself master of all the facts; and, therefore, if I speak to minute things, I may very likely fall into some of those trifling errors which, with the prejudice that now exists against me, may hereafter be regarded as contradictions or acts of prevarication."

"How, then, do you intend to proceed, Monsieur de Masseran?" demanded the King. "Who are these people that you speak of?"

"In the first place, sire," continued the Lord of Masseran, "I will beseech you to call to your presence any one of my servants that may happen to be at hand. I have kept myself to this chamber since I left your majesty, in order that, by holding no communication with any of them, their testimony may be free from suspicion."

"Order one of the Lord of Masseran's servants to appear," said the King, speaking to an usher. "I think you said, my lord," Henry continued, "that there is none in particular whom you would call more than another."

The Lord of Masseran bowed his head, and waited in silence for the return of the messenger, who soon appeared, accompanied by one of the Italian servants, whom he had chosen out of three or four. As soon as the man had approached the King's presence so near as to be heard distinctly, his master demanded, "Do you recollect my sending away Geronimo on any message lately?"

"Yes, my lord," replied the servant; "it was on Wednesday week last."

"Did you hear where I sent him, and on what business?" his lord continued. "If so, tell the King."

"You sent him, my lord, I heard," replied the man, "to seek for the young Count, and give him a packet from you. He was to find him somewhere between Lyons and the frontier."

"If I mistake not," said the Lord of Masseran, "you were the man who brought Geronimo back to my chamber on his return?"

"No, sir," answered the attendant; "but I was standing at the postern door when he arrived, and helped him to dismount under the archway, for he was very stiff and tired."

"Tell the King exactly," said the Lord of Masseran, "at what hour and when he did arrive."

"I think it was at half-past five this morning," replied the man. "It might be a quarter to six, but not more."

"To what does all this tend, my Lord of Masseran?" asked the King, somewhat impatiently. "The history of your courier is surely of no avail here."

"Of much, sire," replied the Lord of Masseran. "Your majesty was pleased to declare that my accusation came before you under circumstances of suspicion. I now show you the whole train by which my information has been accidentally received, that no such suspicion may attach to the evidence. However, enough of this! You have heard that I sent a courier, named Geronimo, some ten days since, to bear a packet from my wife and myself to the young Count of Brienne, and that he returned an hour before I sought your presence. Now shall you hear the tale he bore me, and from his own lips. Let my courier, Geronimo, be called."

Some minutes elapsed ere the man appeared, and all present kept silence, while Bernard de Rohan, standing firm and erect on the King's right hand, gazed sternly upon the Lord of Masseran, who, on his part, bent down his eyes and bit his lips, looking far more like the accused than the accuser, during the whole time of the messenger's absence.

At length the Italian, who had been sent for, came; and certainly his appearance was not calculated to win confidence by the eye. He was, it is true, not only a very tall and powerful, but a remarkably handsome man, of that peculiar kind of beauty which is only to be found in Italy. The features were small and finely formed, the skin, though of a brown hue, was smooth and rosy, the mouth very beautiful, the eye large and brilliant. It was a countenance which might have been called effeminate, perhaps, had it not been for the dark black curling beard and moustache. The expression, however, more than counterbalanced everything that nature had done to make that head as fine a one as ever sculptor chiseled. The habitual contraction of the brow rendered it sullen and inauspicious of look; the unsteady eyes, now cast down or turned aside, now gleaming out from beneath the heavy overhanging eyebrows, like those of the tiger about to spring, seemed to speak insincerity, cunning, and fierceness as plainly as ever the face of man expressed any of the passions of his heart; and the close setting of his teeth, which were heard to jar against each other by those who stood near, ere he answered any question, impressed the spectators with no great idea of his sincerity.

On the present occasion, however, he told his tale with greater facility, straightforwardness, and frankness than perhaps he had ever been known to display in performing such a task before; and from the manner in which the Lord of Masseran conducted the inquiry, an impression grew upon the King's mind that no collusion of any kind did exist between him and his servant.

"Come forward! come forward, Geronimo!" he said, as the man hung back, after entering the hall—"come forward, and tell his majesty the history of this unfortunate business concerning Monsieur de Brienne."

"I have nothing to tell but that he is dead, sir," replied the man. "That he was killed in the forest by Cerdon. I don't mean to say who killed him: I don't know."

"Nay, nay, Geronimo," said the Lord of Masseran, "that is by no means sufficient. You must let the King hear the whole facts as I have heard them. Relate what occurred when I sent you with the packet to Monsieur de Brienne."

"Why, sir, according to your orders," replied the man, "I rode as hard as I could to the Pont d'Ain, and then to Nantua, where I found the young gentleman had been not very long before, and I made inquiries to trace his route, and went after him."

"How far did you gain information of his road?" demanded the King.

"Why, I had to guess a good deal of it, your majesty," answered the man. "The master of the house at Nantua could not tell me whether he had gone to Cerdon or to Leissard: however, he had heard him say that he intended to turn his steps towards Bourg, at all events. To Cerdon I went then——"

"Why to Cerdon?" demanded the King, sharply. "If he were going to Bourg, why should you seek him at Cerdon?"

"Because, may it please your majesty," replied the man, "the people at Nantua told me that there had been messengers coming and going between their house and Cerdon, and that a companion of the young lord had remained at the latter place while he had come on to Nantua. I thought it likely, therefore, and they thought so too, that he might have gone to Cerdon first, so I took the post, and rode thither as fast as I could go."

"And there you heard of his murder, I suppose?" said the Lord of Masseran.

"No, my lord, no," replied the man. "I did not hear of his murder for long after that."

"Let the man go on with his tale, my lord," said the King, speaking to the Lord of Masseran. "What happened at Cerdon, sir? Go on with your story."

"At first the horseboys and the chamberlain told me that the young Count had gone on to Nantua, and that they knew nothing more about him; but the good woman of the inn came out, and told me that there had been a gentleman there waiting for the young lord all the night, just one day before I came, and that she had heard a messenger coming from Nantua tell her lodger—whose name she found from his servant was Bernard de Rohan—that the Count of Brienne had taken the road to Leissard."

The King turned his eyes for a moment to the countenance of Bernard de Rohan, who replied to the look by saying, "It is perfectly true, sire. Everything he has said hitherto I doubt not, may be relied on."

"That is satisfactory, at least," said the King. "Go on, my good friend. What did the woman tell you more?"

"She said, your majesty," answered Geronimo, "that the gentleman had seemed very angry at this news, and jumping upon his horse, which was ready saddled, he set off with his servant towards Leissard at full speed. Well, your majesty, I followed the same way, thinking that I should overtake

them all at Bourg, or, at the worst, at Macon; but, however, I thought it best to inquire as I went; and when I came to Leissard, and found there was nothing but a sort of little *répue* there for an inn, I only stayed to water my horse, and asked the woman of the house if there had been two such gentlemen there as I described. She answered that there had been just such a pair about the same time on the day before, or somewhat earlier, and that a servant was with them. I then asked her if she were very sure, when she answered, Yes, she was sure enough, for that they had been quarrelling, and giving each other hard words about something, she did not well know what, and that she had begged them to be peaceable. After that, I left her, and rode on as hard as I could towards Bourg. A few miles on farther, however, as your majesty knows, towards Ceyserat, one passes the Ain by the bridge, where there is a toll-keeper under the Lord of Ceyserat; and I don't know why, as I was giving him the two deniers for my horse and myself, I asked him if he had seen the two gentlemen and their servant that passed the day before. He said he had not; that one gentleman and one servant had passed, but not two. I said he must be mistaken; and thereat he grew angry, and told me that I wanted to get him into evil repute with his lord——"

"May I ask him one question, your majesty?" said Bernard de Rohan.

"Certainly," answered the monarch. "Everything that can tend to make the matter clearer must be done."

"In telling you that a gentleman and his servant passed at that hour, without another," said Bernard de Rohan, "the toll-keeper was right. But did he not tell you that a second gentleman passed soon after?"

"No, he did not," replied the man; "but, on the contrary, he assured me that no one had passed till towards night, when two carts returned from Leissard: one, a peasant's cart from the mill higher up the river, with the lad that drove it; and the other, a cart which had been carrying goods from Ceyserat to Leissard: with it were two people, a young lad from Ceyserat, and a servant-maid going to Bourg. These, he swore, were all the people who had passed during that day. I marked the whole thing that he told me well, because I was somewhat anxious about the young Count."

"And why were you anxious?" demanded Henry.

"Because," answered the man, "the good woman at Leissard had told me the two gentlemen had quarrelled, and that she thought they would have fought. I, moreover, told the

man that I was anxious about the young gentleman, and asked him what I had best do, when he said, the best thing to do would be to go on to Ceyserat, and make inquiry there; for that there was a ford lower down where the Count might, perhaps, have crossed. I accordingly rode on; but though I could hear of the one gentleman and his servant all the way to Bourg, and I found that his name was Bernard de Rohan, I could hear nothing of the Count de Brienne; and getting more perplexed, I went back again, crossed the bridge, and, with some people I hired to help me from the mill, was tracking my way back to Leissard; when, about half way there, I saw a road that seemed to lead down through the wood, as if towards the river. On inquiry, I found that it brought one to the ford, and we rode down it to see if we could discover anything there. We soon came upon the track of horse's feet: two going, and one coming back. A little farther on, we came to an open space, where, the road being of white sand, we found it a good deal broken up with men's footmarks, as if there had been a struggle. There, too, was some blood upon the ground, not much, but enough to make a good stain. We could not track it in any way, however, from the spot; but in looking about, we saw that the footmarks of one horse went on towards the ford, so that, thinking it sure, even if there had been a quarrel, and a wound given, that the young Count had crossed the river and gone on, I determined to do so likewise. The men who were with me were forced to go back to their work; so, after directing me how best to ford, and seeing me do it, they went their way, and I pursued mine; but now all my inquiries proved in vain, during two days, till at length, towards night on the second day, I came to a cottage somewhere between Cerdon and Tossiat, where I found that the people had caught a horse, which had been roaming about saddled and bridled, but without a rider."

"Were there any stains of blood about the housings?" demanded the King, eagerly.

"None, sire, whatever," replied the man, at once; "but this awakened all my suspicions again; and going back to Leissard, I got a number of people, determined to search the forest, where I had seen the blood, from end to end. It took us three quarters of a day before we found what we sought; but then, your majesty, a dog, which was with one of the men, suddenly flew at something amongst a pile of brambles at the foot of one of the trees; upon which a large she-wolf started out and ran off as hard as she could. One of the

men put back the bushes to see where she had been lying; and there we had it all before us."

There was a dead silence, and every one pressed a little forward, not excepting Bernard de Rohan himself, to listen eagerly to that which was to follow.

"What was it that you beheld?" demanded the King, after the Italian had paused for an instant.

"The sand partly scratched away," replied the man, "and partly covering a dead body which the wolf had been gnawing. We all went up, and got the corpse out on the earth easily, for it was but thinly covered in any place, and there lay the young Count, having been dead seemingly three or four days."

"Might not the wolves have killed him?" demanded the King, in a low but eager voice.

"No, your majesty," answered Geronimo. "In the first place, if they killed him, they must have buried him too; but in the next place, though he was very much gnawed, as you may see by that glove," and drawing forth a thick buckskin glove, embroidered in gold on the back with a count's coronet, and the letters "H. de B.," he laid it before the King; "yet, on his right side, which they had not touched, was a deep sword wound that must have caused his death. His clothes were torn a good deal by the wolves, and there was some blood upon them, but not much. We got help directly, and took the body to Bourg, where it was necessary to bury it soon. After that, I stayed a little to collect what information I could, but no other tidings of any kind were to be got; and the Lord of Ceyserat having promised to send after me one of the persons who were with me when we found the body, I came on hither to tell my lord the whole story. This is all I have to say, sir."

"A sad tale, indeed," said the King, while everybody silently and slowly drew back from Bernard de Rohan, and left him standing alone in the monarch's presence.

Henry looked down thoughtfully for a moment or two, and then raised his eyes to the face of the young nobleman, saying, "This is a most painful and distressing business, and one somewhat difficult to deal with. Although there is nothing proved to attach the deed absolutely to you, Monsieur de Rohan, yet the circumstances of suspicion are far too strong for me to suffer you to remain at liberty. Understand that I do not wish to prejudge a matter which lawful judges appointed for that purpose must investigate more fully; and I say again distinctly that as yet there is not sufficient evidence to attach this deed absolutely to you——"

"But, sire," exclaimed the Lord of Masseran, "I have not yet by any means concluded the case against Monsieur de Rohan. Let his own servant be sent for—the one who was with him—and let him say whether his lord did not accompany Henry of Brienne till within a few minutes of his death. Let him tell all that he saw and heard, and you will then find that there is more than suspicion attaches to Monsieur de Rohan. I saw that servant myself this very morning, and made inquiries concerning the terrible affair, now before your majesty. May he not be sent for?"

"Certainly," replied the King. "Let him be brought hither."

The man was accordingly sent for; and Bernard de Rohan was about to speak in the interim, but the King stopped him, saying, "You had better, Monsieur de Rohan, suffer the case of your accuser to be fully brought to an end before you say anything."

"As your majesty pleases," replied Bernard de Rohan. "The matter, as far as I am concerned, is perfectly straightforward. I have nothing to do but to display to you every part of my conduct exactly as it happened. But, however, I bow to your majesty's pleasure, and will wait till my attendant, Pierre Millort, has been examined; only adding that no one can feel more grief and horror at this sad event than I do."

The pause was somewhat long, for the man was found with difficulty; and the King conversed in a low voice with several of those around him, seeming to gather the opinion of the persons in whom he could best confide regarding the case before him; while Bernard de Rohan and the Lord of Masseran stood silently confronting each other; and again the persons around remarked in their demeanour the extraordinary reverse of expression which we have before noticed: Bernard de Rohan bearing the firm, steadfast, determined aspect of the accuser; and the Lord of Masseran looking dully down upon the ground, as if labouring under some heavy charge which he could not repel.

At length Pierre Millort was brought into the audience chamber, and many eyes were instantly fixed upon him. He was pale, agitated, almost trembling, and, in circumstances where frank sincerity and calm firmness of mind were most wanting, it was evident that everything like courage and resolution had causelessly abandoned him. His very look of guilt and hesitation created an universal feeling of doubt and suspicion, not only against him but against his master.

"Stand forward, sir!" said the King, in a sharp tone—"stand

forward! Now look me in the face, and answer the questions asked you. Are you a servant of the Baron de Rohan?"

"Yes, sire, I am, may it please your majesty," replied the man, in a faltering voice. "A poor, faithful domestic, your majesty, born upon his own estates, and—and——"

"Speak out, sir!" said Bernard de Rohan. "Take courage! You, at least, have no cause to fear. Answer every question truly and sincerely as it is asked you, and conceal nothing on any account."

"Did you accompany your master," said the Lord of Masseran, "some seven or eight days ago, from Cerdon to Leissard?"

The man hesitated, and then replied, in a low and scarcely audible tone, "That he did not well know the names of the places."

"Pierre Millort!" exclaimed Bernard de Rohan, angry and indignant at the man's prevarication—"Pierre Millort, you are speaking a falsehood. You know perfectly well that you did accompany me from Cerdon to Leissard."

The servant turned an anxious and imploring look upon his master, as if he would have said, "Pray do not you also join with them. I am doing the best I can for you." But, at the same time he replied, aloud, "I believe those were the names of the places, my lord; but I thought I was to be very strict in everything I said."

"In telling the plain truth, sir!" said the King. "Now answer the Lord of Masseran's question directly. Did you accompany your master from Cerdon to Leissard?"

"I believe those were the names of the places, your majesty," replied the man.

"Did your master overtake anybody at Leissard," demanded the Lord of Masseran, "or in its neighbourhood?"

It was impossible, however, to get the truth at once from weak Pierre Millort. He affected to misunderstand, declaring that they had overtaken a number of carts and market-people, and when at length brought to the point by a question which he could not evade, as to whether his master had joined the young Count de Brienne at Leissard, he hesitated for some little time, as if doubting whether to answer the truth or not. When pressed by farther interrogations regarding the conduct and demeanour of the two gentlemen, and what had become of the young Count of Brienne, he deviated into direct falsehood, declaring that they had seemed perfectly good friends, and that they had parted amicably at the corner of one of the roads. Bernard de

Rohan looked down and bit his lip, while the small keen eyes of the Lord of Masseran seemed to dart flames of fire at the attendant of his enemy.

"I vow before Heaven," cried the Savoyard, at length, "that the account given me by this very man, not two hours ago, was as different from the tale he now tells as light from darkness!"

"Most likely, my Lord of Masseran," said Bernard de Rohan, interposing, in a clear, firm voice—"most likely what the man told you this morning, when he thought his lord in no danger, was true; for certainly what he has said now, under a foolish belief that deceit can be of service to a good cause, is utterly false, and he knows it to be so.—Sire," he continued, turning to the King, "if your majesty would have heard me but now, I would have saved you the trouble of dealing with this foolish person, by telling you myself the whole truth, exactly as it stands, without evasion, hesitation, or fear. Strong in my innocence, I have no occasion for concealment of any kind. All that the Lord of Masseran has said, although he be my enemy, and all that his servant has reported, up to the period of my quitting Leissard in company with Henry de Brienne, is perfectly true."

"That is candid at least," said the King, with an approving bend of the head. "Go on, Monsieur de Rohan."

"After quitting Leissard," continued the young cavalier, "there comes a period which neither of them knows anything about, but which that man, Pierre Millort, might have related if he had not chosen to play the fool and the liar. Angry words took place between Henry de Brienne and myself, almost as soon as we met. I reproached him for not having acted fairly by me, in deviating from our plan of seeking his sister together; and he replied angrily—I may almost say madly, for I can see no motive for his conduct. This dispute continued for some way along the road, till at length, in a fit of violent passion, he declared he would separate from me altogether, and darted down the by-way which probably leads to the ford the Italian has mentioned. Now comes a period which no one knows but myself, since what we have heard to-day shows that the only other person who did know it is, alas, no more!"

Bernard de Rohan paused, with a look of sadness, for a moment, and every head stooped a little forward, and every ear was bent to listen. "After considering for a moment," said Bernard de Rohan, "grieved to see him in such a state, for I had been trying in vain to soothe him, I resolved to

make one more effort not to part in anger with the brother of her I loved, and I rode after him as fast as possible. I overtook him at the sandy opening of which the Italian has spoken, and found him dismounted from his horse, and taking out a stone which had stuck in the animal's foot. He turned upon me furiously, seeming to regard my coming after him as an insult. Though the only words I spoke were intended to soothe and calm him, they seemed but to irritate him the more, and casting from him my proffered hand, he drew his sword upon me——"

Bernard de Rohan paused, and the King exclaimed, "You fought, and he fell!"

"No, sire," replied the young cavalier, firmly and emphatically: "No! We did not. I put aside his sword, grasping the blade with my hand; and then telling him that if such were his feelings I would follow him no farther, but trust to time and reflection to change them towards me, I left him, and returned slowly to the spot where I had left my servant on the road. As I turned away from Henry de Brienne, he said something which I did not stay to hear; but he seemed somewhat saddened and rebuked, and the only words I caught, implied, that he had been put upon a task which would drive him mad."

"Pray why did you not remain when you saw him soothed?" demanded the King, gazing on the young cavalier somewhat sternly.

"Because, sire, I feared my own temper and his," replied Bernard de Rohan. "He was always impetuous, vehement, and passionate, and often disposed to quarrel with his best friends when he was in any difficulty, rather than explain the nature of it to them. For my own part, his words and actions had both been insulting to me: I would have borne such from no other living man; and though, for his dear sister's sake, I had endured them, I feared to trust myself with one who, in ten minutes more, might repeat them all with aggravation. This, sire, is all I have to tell. After leaving him, I pursued my search for Isabel; but finding that she had sought your majesty's protection, I followed hither with all speed."

The King gazed thoughtfully upon the countenance of the young cavalier for some minutes; and then, turning away, walked slowly to the door of a small cabinet which communicated with the western side of the room, saying, as he did so, "Vieilleville, come hither with me. The rest wait till my return." As soon as the door was closed, he demanded,

"What think you of all this, Vieilleville? His words are spoken like truth."

"I fear, sire, that the case is a very clear one," replied the Maréchal. "As you may remember, you sent this unhappy young Count to seek for his sister, and bring her to Paris, with an express injunction to separate her from poor de Rohan. On this, depend upon it, they have quarrelled—most likely in the way he himself describes. But the event is clear; one is dead, the other wounded in the hand! De Rohan, knowing well that, if he acknowledges the deed, he puts an eternal barrier between himself and her he loves, has concealed the death of his rash young adversary, and now is in some sort compelled to maintain the same story. It is a sad affair, indeed, but I do not think at all mysterious."

"My own conclusion is the same as yours," replied the King; "but though we may pity, we must not let justice be turned aside, and I fear I must send him to his trial."

"It must be so, I fear, sire," replied the Maréchal: "then, if any extenuating circumstances appear, or if he confess the matter as a casual rencontre, you can pardon him."

"I think not," replied Henry, somewhat sternly. "Those chance rencontres are but excuses for murder, Vieilleville. Have I not often declared, that an act so committed without due witnesses shall be rewarded with death? However, he has not confessed, and he stands upon his innocence. By his own plea he must be tried; but there is no doubt, I think, that a sufficient case is made out against him to send him to prison. I grieve deeply, for I do believe that a nobler gentleman does not live in France, and certainly a better or more promising soldier has not appeared in our day. Nevertheless, it cannot be helped; and I must be the more resolute on account of the very pain it gives me. Whither shall I send him—to the Bastille?"

"No, sire," replied De Vieilleville: "by so doing it will give quite another air to his offence—that cannot be properly assigned to any but prisoners of state. This gentleman, sire, is accused of common homicide; and for him the ordinary prison of the Châtelet is the only place, notwithstanding his rank, character, and station."

"We will make no exception in favour of rank," said the King; "and as for the rest, we must judge, from the result of the trial, of what is his amount of guilt. Come, then, De Vieilleville: it is a painful task, but the sooner it is over the better."

Thus saying, the King returned into the audience chamber;

and, moving slowly through the number of courtiers there assembled, took his seat in the chair where he usually received the ministers of foreign states. Every one was eager to hear the first words that he pronounced, although the heavy sternness of his brow already announced sufficiently the nature of his decision. "Monsieur de Rohan," he said, at length, "it is with deep regret that I have to inform you, after patiently hearing your own statement, the charge against you, and the proofs of that charge, that I am obliged to acknowledge, such reasonable cause of suspicion does exist in this case, as to compel me to send you to confinement for trial by your lawful judges. I hope and trust that you will be able to prove your innocence; but I would exhort you most earnestly to consider well what you are about; and if, in truth, anger and provocation have induced you to commit a minor offence than that of which you are accused, to confess at once that it is so, and have recourse to mercy rather than appeal to justice."

"Sire, I thank you most deeply," replied Bernard de Rohan, "for your kindness and condescension. I acknowledge fully that your decision in sending me to trial is perfectly just. The case of suspicion made out is sufficiently strong. It may be stronger still, it may even go far enough to convince honest and honourable judges that I am guilty, though I am most innocent. Nevertheless, sire, no fear on earth shall ever induce my tongue to tell a falsehood; to say that I have done that which I have not done, or acknowledge a crime that is repugnant to my whole feelings. I declare most solemnly that the statement which I have made to your majesty is perfectly true and accurate; and from that statement I will never vary in the slightest degree, let the result be what it may."

"May it appear that you are innocent!" said the King, rising.

But the Lord of Masseran, who had a keen and eager desire of seeing everything secured which could render the condemnation of Bernard de Rohan certain, interposed, exclaiming, "Were it not necessary, sire, to make sure of the person of this honest servant of this honest master, good Pierre Millort, who this morning told me one story, and an hour after gave your majesty another? Contradicted by his own lord, and convicted of notorious falsehood, he may well, before a few hours are over, manufacture a new history to regale the ears of the judges."

"That must not be," replied the King—"that must not be.

Prévôt, look to him also, and in half an hour convey the prisoners hence, hand them both over to the proper officers of the Châtelet, to wait judgment according to law. Let the room be cleared of all but the prisoners and the prévôt, who shall soon have farther orders."

Thus saying, the King passed out of the audience hall, followed slowly by the various members of the court, while Bernard de Rohan remained with his eyes gazing upon the ground, and feeling heavily the hand of fate upon him.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE heart of Bernard de Rohan sunk for a moment under the weight that oppressed it. It was one of those instants when "the whole head is heavy and the whole heart is sad" —when the joys gone by render present pangs but the more bitter—when we seem to be pressed upon, on every side, by rushing thoughts, each more agonizing than another, pouring in on all sides from the past and from the future, crushing resolution and extinguishing hope—It was an instant when —as in one of those painful dreams where our corporeal strength lies prostrate, where the voice cannot cry for help, nor the feet struggle, nor the hands fight—every effort of the mind seems vain under the benumbing weight which misfortune casts upon us.

With Bernard de Rohan, however, such a state lasted but a short time; and it was the thought of Isabel de Brienne that recalled him to himself. "She will be here!" he murmured: "I heard the King's promise! I know what it meant!" and though he felt that the meeting would be terrible, yet he felt, also, that to leave her, perhaps for ever, without that meeting would be more terrible still. To make it as little painful to her as possible, was his next determination; to soothe her, to calm, to encourage her with hope, and to hide from her carefully, for the time, the dark and horrible conviction which he himself felt, that there was a great, a strong probability of his condemnation—that there was a chance of every suspicion against him being aggravated rather than diminished by investigation.

"It will come upon her by degrees," he thought. "If it all falls on her at once: the tidings of her brother's death and the prospect of my destruction, it will overwhelm her utterly."

He had had but a few minutes for such considerations, when the latch of the door was raised, and he turned to welcome her. He was deceived, however. One of the ushers entered, and beckoning to the prévôt, spoke to him for a moment or two on the other side of the room. What was said, Bernard de Rohan did not hear; but at length the prévôt said, "Very well. Place an archer at each door, then, and come back when it is done."

The usher disappeared, and in a minute or two again looked in.

"Monsieur de Rohan," said the prévôt, as soon as he saw him, "I am commanded to leave you here, for half an hour, with some one who wishes to speak to you. At the end of that time, however, you must be prepared to depart, without fail; nor will you regard me ill for requiring your interview to be brought at once to a close."

Bernard de Rohan signified his assent, and the prévôt beckoning away the young nobleman's ill-judging servant, Pierre Millort, left him alone. His heart beat eagerly, but the suspense lasted only for a moment. He heard steps approaching the instant after, and Isabel entered, pale certainly as death, her bright eyes wild and eager, though tearless, but still most beautiful, and to his heart most beloved. She paused to gaze at him for a single instant, while he asked himself, "Is it possible that she can doubt my innocence?"

Her next movement answered that question at once; for seeing that he paused and gazed at her sadly and inquiringly, she sprang forward and cast herself upon his bosom.

"Dear, dear Isabel," he said, "this is very terrible, my beloved—terrible in every way to be torn from you thus at all—to be accused of a horrible crime—to be suspected even, of a crime that must separate me from you for ever—to be doomed to ignominious imprisonment and trial—and, above all, to be taken away from you at a moment when you so much need consolation and comfort. All, all is terrible, almost beyond endurance. But tell me, Isabel, tell me, as some relief, tell me that you do not believe me guilty."

"Guilty!" she exclaimed. "You guilty, Bernard, of killing my brother! You guilty of raising your hand against Henry de Brienne! Oh, no! Those who suspect you, know little of you; or rather, they judge from their own base hearts."

"Nay, nay, my beloved," he replied, "let us not do them injustice. They have many causes for suspicion. The circumstances are certainly extraordinary — peculiar — dark. You have not heard all the particulars that appear against me."

"Yes, yes, I have," replied Isabel. "Good Father Willand has been with me in the Queen's cabinet, and mingling amongst the crowd behind you while the investigation lasted, has brought me the tidings from time to time. I believe all that you have said, Bernard. I know it all to be true; for I know poor Henry's character, and I know yours. I can understand how it all happened. Henry was sent to separate you and me, after the edict that annulled our marriage—annulled it in the sight of man, but not in the sight of God! He promised the King, or some one else, I hear, that if he found me, he would not let us hold any communication whatsoever till we were in the King's presence. He did not like to tell you this—was, perhaps, half ashamed of the promise itself—would rather that you had found me without him; and, as was always the case with him, grew angry when he became embarrassed, and freed himself from his momentary difficulty by plunging into worse and more painful embarrassments. In the end, the frankness of his nature would have brought it all right, but in the meantime he doubtless did injure and insult you——"

"He did, Isabel, he did," replied Bernard de Rohan; "but by my honour—by my love for you, dear girl——"

"I need no assurance!" she said: "Do not that wrong to my confidence, Bernard, to offer one asseveration in proof of the innocence whereof I have no doubt. You did not take the life of Henry de Brienne—you did not, you could not draw your sword upon my brother—I know it to be impossible, Bernard—I have no doubt—I have no hesitation; and God will yet make the truth to appear."

"I trust he may," answered Bernard de Rohan; "I trust he may, my Isabel!—But we must not deceive ourselves," he added, the plan he had laid down for his conduct towards her being changed by discovering the knowledge of all the circumstances which she had gained from the priest,—"we must not deceive ourselves in the matter, Isabel! The circumstances, strange as they are, are full of somewhat more than even suspicion. I will own, too, that did I hear a charge against a stranger supported by such proofs, I should myself be inclined to deem him guilty."

Isabel cast down her eyes, and, for the first time, the tears rose in them. "Oh, they do not know you! They do not know you, Bernard!" she said, at length.

"That is what I fear, Isabel," replied Bernard de Rohan. "A person charged with such a crime as this, is given over to judges who do not know him; who are not aware of all

those latent thoughts, feelings, and principles in his nature, those peculiarities, which affect and modify the actions of each particular man. They may hear his general reputation from witnesses, they may be told that he has heretofore lived an honourable, upright, a humane, a gentle life, but they can know nothing of how impossible it is for men of some peculiar characters to perform the acts which are done without hesitation by others. Even if, amongst the judges, there be one or two who do know the person brought before them, who can judge of his principles, and from them divine his conduct, they are strictly forbidden to make the attempt, and told to judge alone by what appears before them. But, at the same time, a terrible and dangerous latitude is allowed to them, on the other hand, in supposing a connexion between events where no connexion is really proved, in supplying, from their own imagination, the broken links of a chain of what is called circumstantial evidence. This, Isabel, this is all I have to fear. No eye ever saw my sword drawn against your brother, or my hand strike the blow, for neither the one nor the other ever took place. But that I followed him into the wood, that we had quarrelled, that I was with him or near him towards the very time that the deed was done, seems to be beyond all doubt. The little that is wanting will be easily supplied by fancy; and I fear, my Isabel, that no allowance will be made for a life of honour and integrity, or a name hitherto unstained and pure."

His words came cold upon the hopes that Isabel had been striving to encourage, though those hopes had been founded more upon Him who never fails, than upon anything that man could do. She replied not for several minutes, but remained standing, with her eyes fixed upon the ground, and her hands resting in his, while he gazed upon her with the fond lingering look of hopeless parting.

"There is one promise which you must make me, Isabel," he said, at length; and, in reply, she looked up with gladness, as if to promise whatever he asked, were to her a joy, exclaiming,—

"What is it? what is it, Bernard? You have but to tell it."

"It is, Isabel," he said, "that whatever may be the result of the circumstances in which we are placed, whatever may be the judgment of men in regard to the charge against me, you, you, will never believe me guilty; and, at all events, I appeal to God, before whose throne we shall some time meet, to justify your love and confidence. Let this, dearest, let

this ever be remembered; and now, and henceforth for ever, believe me innocent, whatever may occur."

Thus saying, he clasped his arms round her; and she, weeping on his bosom, repeated again and again the promise he had required,—a promise easy for her to make; for though others might doubt, suspect, or condemn, it was impossible for her to believe him guilty.

While they were yet thus clasped in each other's arms, there were voices heard speaking at the door. "If you do not respect my gown," said some one without, "respect the King's order, at least. Look there, and let me in, if not for the cloth, for the parchment; though I don't see, for my part, why the skin should be better than the wool."

"Ah! the King's order is another affair," said the voice of an usher. "Go in, but the time is nearly expired, and the horses are coming round." Thus saying, he opened the door and gave admission to the jovial form of Father Willand, who entered with a countenance somewhat more serious than usual, and approached the lovers as they stood together, saying,—

"I am sorry to disturb you, my children, but the King has sent me, Master Bernard, to exhort you to confess; and, by my faith, he would fain put the confession into your mouth, too, and make you own that you killed this poor youth in a chance encounter. For my part, I have but one word to say to you: are you guilty?"

"I need hardly tell you, I am not," replied Bernard de Rohan. "I am as innocent as you are, my good father: and, since you are here, let me beseech you to attach yourself to this dear girl; protect, support her when I, perhaps, am gone; for this storm is a heavy one, and I feel as if it would beat me down."

"Hush, hush!" said Father Willand, dashing a drop from his eye. "Men are easily condemned in France, it is true; but you were born for better things than to die a dog's death. However, to the Châtelet you must go, that is clear enough; and now listen to me: there are two sorts of comfort in this world: one consists in fine airy rooms, good dishes, and soft sleeping; the other in having to do with kindly hearts, though they may show themselves in rough forms. By bribes and civil speeches to the governor of the Châtelet you may get him to put you up stairs in the great tower, and there you may get food of a better kind by paying for every mouthful; but, if you would take my advice, you would refuse all such extortions, treat the governor as a small

knave, and let him put you, if he will, in one of the common cells. He dare not put you in the *oubliettes*, or the *cradle*, or the *End-of-ease*, or any of those dungeons where a prisoner may live fifteen days, but no longer; for he knows the matter will be inquired into. When I lived in Paris, many a time I used to visit the prisoners in the Châtelet, to give them the best consolation that a poor mortal like themselves could give, by telling them of things above mortality. I found that, though the turnkeys of the higher prison were held to be in station above the others, yet that the common gaoler, Bertrand Saar, though in shape, look, and voice more like a bear than a man, was warm and kind of heart, and not without a stock of comfort for all occasions. With him you will be better than the others, especially if you tell him that you have an humble friend in Father Willand. But farewell, farewell, my son—here comes the prévôt. Bear up, bear up, dear lady; we shall see better times yet."

But Isabel still clung to the breast of him she loved. She felt that they must part, but yet she could hardly command her heart to do so. Again and again she suffered her clinging arms to relax their hold; again and again she clasped them around him with the convulsive embrace of parting love; and, at length, when once more kissing her fair brow, he gently freed himself from her, she sank slowly down upon the ground where she stood, and burying her eyes in her hands, wept aloud. She heard his receding steps; she marked the stillness that succeeded; a sickening weariness of all the things of life came over her heart, her brain grew dizzy, the blood seemed to stagnate in her veins, and a period of forgetfulness came over her, as the only relief to suffering too acute for long corporal endurance.

CHAPTER XXXII.

The criminal prison of the Petit Châtelet was a large gloomy pile of building, surrounded by a fosse and walls, and having in the centre a huge shapeless tower, generally attributed, like that of the greater Châtelet, to Julius Cæsar. If any part of the building was Roman, however, the greater part of it was of a more recent date; some portions attributed, probably with justice, to the Merovingian kings of France; and some, undoubtedly, built by monarchs subsequent to the

accession of the house of Valois.* The whole of it, however, had been blackened with time; and turret, and pinnacle, and tower, and loophole, all bore so dark and gloomy an aspect, that the very look thereof seemed to speak of suffering, and tyranny, and despair.

A writer, who witnessed its destruction somewhat more than half a century ago, expresses a degree of joy and triumph over its fall, which marks the odium and abhorrence in which it had ever been held. "I have passed over its ruins," he says, "but what an aspect! Half-opened vaults, subterranean dungeons, which received the air for the first time during so many years, seemed to disclose to the frightened eyes of the spectators the victims who had been swallowed up in their dark shades. An involuntary shudder seized one as the sight plunged down into those profound caves. 'Is it, then, in such a place,' one exclaimed, 'is it at such a place in the bosom of the earth, in a pit fit for the dead, that men have confined the living? These dungeons are about to serve for the future, as cellars to the houses about to be built around, but the walls themselves must be still full of the sighs of despair. Who will dare to place there his tun of wine? Who will ever be able to drink it, without remembering the wretches who have groaned within those walls in torment of body and in anguish of mind more terrible still?'"

To that abode of sorrow and anguish—then, if we may use the term, in the prime of its horrors—was Bernard de Rohan brought from the gay scene at Fontainbleau. It was dark when he arrived; and, as he passed through the dull heavy gate, the long perspective arch of which, lighted by torches, showed the extreme thickness of the wall through which it had been pierced, he felt indeed as if earthly hope were for ever left behind him.

The actual governor of the prison, or rather his lieutenant, was below in the court-yard; a number of strange harsh faces were seen round about by the torchlight. The archers† who guarded him were all strangers, and the only familiar face that he could see on any side, as he gazed round, was that of the servant, Pierre Millort, which, as we may well suppose, was painful to him to behold.

The governor read the order for receiving the prisoners by the light of one of the torches; but then another packet, con-

* See Du Laure.

† It must not be supposed that these personages, though termed archers, were armed with bows and arrows.

taining apparently private orders, was handed to him, which he perused with some appearance of discontent.

"Here, Jean Banc," he said, calling to one of his men, "look at that."

The man read it, and then turned an inquiring glance to the face of his principal, who said a few words, ending with, "Go up to him, and see if you can make anything of him."

The man accordingly approached the young cavalier, and addressed him in a tone half sullen, half civil. "I find, sir," he said, "that we are to put you in the best part of the tower. I suppose you are not unwilling to pay for accommodation."

The words of Father Willand came back to Bernard de Rohan's mind, and he replied, "I desire in no degree to be treated otherwise than as a common prisoner. I will pay the sum appointed by law: the rest must depend upon yourselves."*

"You should be treated as a common prisoner, sure enough," replied the man, his tone increasing in sullenness, "if it depended upon us, but we have the king's order to put you in the tower;" and the governor himself, perceiving that his effort to extort money was of no avail, came forward, and went through the necessary formalities of receiving his prisoner, without addressing more words to him than necessary. He was then conducted up a small staircase to a room high up in the tower, where, at all events, he had the advantage of free air. That, however, was all; for, besides the bed, the table, and the chair that it contained, the room was vacant. There were no means of occupying a single hour: nor book, nor writing materials, nor any one article which could be employed to divert or amuse the weary mind under imprisonment and grief. The gaoler put down a lamp, but retired without saying a word; and then came the harsh locking of the door, that shut the prisoner from the world without.

"I can bear it," said Bernard de Rohan, casting himself down in a chair: "I have borne imprisonment before, and worse than this."

* We find the rates of payment in the prison of the greater Châtelet thus recorded:—

A count or countess	10 livres.
A knight banneret	20 sous.
A simple knight or lady	5 sous.
A squire or young lady of noble birth	12 deniers.
A Lombard	12 deniers.
A Jew	11 sous.

But he was mistaken. He had indeed borne imprisonment before, and imprisonment of a dark and dreary nature, under circumstances of much anxiety and grief; but he had not borne imprisonment under a charge of dark and terrible crimes, with a prospect of nothing but fresh anguish, trial, condemnation, death, the loss of her he loved, the knowledge of her agony, the want of power to serve, support, or save her from the long and bitter trials she would have to sustain. All this was new to him, and all this was far more terrible than anything he had hitherto undergone. The struggle of a few hours, however, enabled him to conquer the anguish and to prepare his mind for endurance.

There is something in the capability which a resolute heart finds within itself of resisting with unquailing power the worst evils of fate and fortune, that gives a grand and sustaining consolation under each immediate infliction, which nothing else can afford. Conscious virtue itself may fail under accumulated ills and wrongs; but the strong determination of bearing all unflinchingly begets in itself fresh strength, and even from many of our weaknesses, from pride, from vanity itself, obtains aid and derives vigour.

Bernard de Rohan had the consciousness of virtue, and he had also that strong resolution which is needful to make such consciousness powerful as a sustaining principle. Fate itself, he thought, shall not terrify me, anguish shall not wring anything from me; I will bear injustice and death without a word, or without a remonstrance, even unto the end. Nor did his resolution fail, though during the next three days he held no communication whatsoever with any human being, though the gaoler who attended upon him came and went in silence, and refused to cheer him even by a reply to his questions.

At length, however, on the morning of the third day, he was summoned to appear before the court appointed to conduct his trial. As was then very customary, the judges were named by the King himself, a practice often abused, but which in this case had been employed rather to favour than to condemn the prisoner. The persons selected were those famous for equity and for a knowledge of the laws; and when Bernard de Rohan appeared before them, he found that all the members of the court assembled in the hall of the Châtelet were strangers to him; but on hearing the names of his judges, he did not find one to whom he could object.

On this occasion, the hall was totally void of spectators. No one was admitted but the two guards who attended the

prisoner, and the ushers at the doors. The other persons that it contained were the judges, ranged in a long row at the end of the hall, the clerks at tables below them, and one or two officers of the court standing at the ends of the benches.

The prisoner was brought forward and placed on the elevated seat called the sellette, where he was interrogated for nearly an hour by his judges, for the purpose of ascertaining, by the means of that mental torture, whether he would waver or hesitate in any part of his testimony. Nothing, however, could be elicited from him but the plain, straightforward tale which he had before told; and the various witnesses being called in, Bernard de Rohan found himself once more confronted with the Lord of Masseran and with his Italian servant, Geronimo.

All that had been proved before was now repeated; the Italian told the same tale, and varied not in reply to the questions that were asked him. But another witness now appeared, in the person of one of those who had accompanied the Italian when the dead body was found, and who corroborated the whole of the previous statement.

At length, Pierre Millort was also called, and for some time interrogated strictly. Once more he displayed the same weakness that he had shown before. Simply from fear, he wavered, he hesitated, he prevaricated, he contradicted himself. His master gazed upon him sternly as he went on, wondering not a little that no observation in regard to his evident falsehood broke from the lips of the judges themselves; but they suffered it to pass unnoticed; and at length one of them turned towards the young cavalier, asking, as had been the case with all previous witnesses, if he had any questions to put.

"I could have wished," replied Bernard de Rohan, "to have asked this man what length of time I was absent, when I followed my poor friend into the forest, leaving him upon the road. It is vain, however to do so; for whatever he were to say, no one would believe it. His testimony—at least, in my favour—is worthless."

"Pray to what would the question tend?" demanded the judge who had before spoken. "Perhaps we may put it in such a way as to prevent his prevaricating."

"It would tend, sir," replied Bernard de Rohan, "to show that I had not been absent a sufficient length of time to murder my friend, to drag his body to the spot described, and to bury it by any means that I could then command."

"I will attend to the suggestion afterwards," said the judge, "and give you the benefit of it. This, sir, is only the first examination; we cannot close the business till we have received authentic copies of the information taken at Bourg."

The examination of Pierre Millort was then continued for some time longer; but all that he heard, and all that he saw, seemed only to terrify and distract him the more, and at length the presiding judge announced, in a clear, distinct tone, that all persons but the prisoner and the last witness were to leave the court. As he spoke, he fixed his eyes sternly upon Pierre Millort, but neither the unhappy man nor his master comprehended fully the meaning of those orders.

The ushers retired from the doors; all the clerks but one withdrew; the Lord of Masseran, also, who had remained hitherto as the accuser, slowly left the hall, and the doors closed behind them all, leaving Bernard de Rohan still upon the sellette, with Pierre Millort standing before the judges. One or two of the magistrates themselves looked down with pale countenances upon the papers before them and a sensation of awe took possession of Bernard de Rohan, from a vague, but indistinct notion of what was about to take place.

At length, when the doors were shut, the president rang a small silver bell which stood beside him, and another pair of doors, which hitherto had not been opened, were thrown back. Bernard de Rohan, as he sat, could not see into that chamber; but Pierre Millort, who stood in the witness's place, did see, and was instantly seized with an aguish shaking from head to foot.

"Monsieur de Rohan," said the president, "it is the will of the King, of which we, your judges, fully approve, that as you have not, in the least prevaricated, but have maintained, unwavering, the same story, and have neither refused to plead nor challenged your judges, you should not be subject to the question extraordinary. This man, however, Pierre Millort, having shown himself a notorious prevaricator, and unworthy of belief under ordinary circumstances, must be taught, by the force of corporeal pain, to speak the truth."

"I do beseech you, sir," said Bernard de Rohan, "if it be possible, spare the unhappy man. You must all perceive clearly that a weak notion of serving me, by concealing suspicious circumstances, first misled him, and that, since he has been in this place, terror and folly have quite bewildered him. Spare him, then, sir, spare him, if it be possible, and let the whole weight of his testimony go against myself."

"It is impossible, sir," replied the judge. "We must not reject the means assigned to us for the purpose of arriving at substantial justice. — Take him away!" he continued, addressing two men who had entered from the chamber of the torture, and who instantly seized upon the unhappy servant, and drew him towards the open doors, notwithstanding prayers, and tears, and struggles.—"I was going to say," continued the president, speaking to the prisoner, "that if you so please, as you may be inculpated by his confession, you may enter the chamber of the question, and hear the words he uses."

Bernard de Rohan shook his head. "No, sir!" he said, "no! It is enough—it is too much to know that such horrid dealings are taking place with a fellow-creature. I will not witness them;" and leaning his arm upon his knee, he buried his eyes in his hand.

Almost as he did so, a small dark-looking man entered the hall, and spoke a few words to the president in a low voice. The judge replied emphatically, "Fortes et dures!"

Another few low-spoken words were addressed to him by the messenger from the chamber of the torture, and his reply was, "Jusqu'à la mort—even unto death! should it be necessary;—but you have the surgeon there!"

The man nodded his head, and retired. Then came an interval not exactly of silence, but of low sobs and of stifled entreaties, and of sounds of wailing as of a person in deep grief and fear. The young gentleman sat listening in horror and indignation of heart, till at length, in about five minutes more, there issued forth a shrill and piercing cry of anguish from the chamber of the torture, that made the whole hall ring, and even blanched the lips of the judges that sat at the table. Then came another, another, and another cry; and a loud voice at length was heard to say, "You are carrying it too far; relax the wheel a little."

"I will confess, I will confess!" cried the voice of the unhappy Pierre within. "I will confess all; I do believe he murdered him—I know he did—I was sure of it at the time. It was that made me speak falsely. He was my master, my born master. — Oh, God! Oh, God! Set me free! Set me free!"

"But were you the accomplice of his crime?" cried another voice from within. "Did you know he was going to do the deed?"

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed the unhappy man. "I knew nothing, I knew nothing. It was all——" another fearful

shriek interrupted what he was saying, as the rack seemed to have been more extended by the executioner, and then suddenly came a dead silence.

"Set him free, set him free!" cried several voices. "He is gone."

"He has only fainted," said the voice that had asked the questions.

"He is dead!" said another voice, probably that of the surgeon. "I told you, you were turning the wheel too far."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

The old gardens of the Louvre have long given place to other things; and the booth of a man who sells paroquets now occupies the spot where some of the first foreign flowers and rare shrubs were planted in France. Those gardens, however, still existed in their beauty at the time we speak of; and on a fine autumn evening, some few days after the events recorded in the last chapter, Henry the Second walked there alone, unaccompanied even by a page.

It was now late in September, and the hour was about six o'clock in the afternoon. The air was fresh and delicious, the tempered sunshine was streaming upon the walks from a point low in the sky, and the air and the scene altogether were such as a monarch might well choose for a brief period of solitary thought and tranquil contemplation, after the fatigues either of kingly care, anxiety, and business, or of courtly pomp, amusement, and gaiety;—for, after all, everything in this world, whether of pleasure or of business, ends in fatigue: unless it be commune with our own hearts, and with God in his bright works.

In such a scene, too, and at such a moment, the heart of a monarch might well become softened. Its natural feelings were not diverted there by the pressure of many momentous things, by the urgency of relentless policy, the considerations of harsh expediency, by anger, irritation, or vexation; neither was it rendered callous or careless by the varieties, and pleasures, and frivolities of courtly society: in the quiet sunshine and silent solitude the voice of tenderness and human charity could be heard, no longer drowned in the insect buzz of everlasting trifles.

It was wise, then, of those who chose such a moment to

appeal to the heart of the monarch for an act of mercy, and such was the purpose with which, at the end of about half an hour, the dauphin Francis, his sister Claude, and good Father Willand, the priest, approached the King, and interrupted his solitary walk.

Henry received his two children kindly, and taking the Princess's hand in his own, continued to pursue his walk, only marking the presence of Father Willand by a slight shade, not exactly of displeasure, but of sadness.

"Well, Claude," he said, "I am about to part with you soon, fair one, to give you as a bride to this valorous Prince, who may well say that he has won you by his sword. You will be sorry to leave me. Is it not so?"

"Most truly, my dear father," she replied; "but let us not now talk of such sorrowful things, for I come to speak with you upon another, which, at present, is little less so, but which you may render happier if you will."

"Nay, nay, no petitions, Claude," said the King. "I thought I knew your errand when I saw that good man; but I must have no petitions."

"But, indeed, dear father, we are all petitioners," said the Dauphin, "and all in the same cause. We come to beseech you to remit the sentence of this unhappy young gentleman."

"Is the sentence pronounced?" demanded the King.

"It is, sire," answered the Dauphin; "and it is death."

"Then he must die!" replied the King, solemnly; "for I will not interpose."

"I beseech you, my father, consider," said the Princess. "Even if you pardon him, he must still undergo a terrible punishment, for she whom he loves can never give her hand to a man condemned for killing her brother."

"And besides, sire," added the Dauphin, "think how hard it is that he should be the first to suffer for one of these unhappy rencounters, when, in all probability, he was provoked thereunto by insults that were not to be borne."

"Has he confessed the deed," demanded the King. "If he have done so, that may make a great difference; for at present he stands condemned, through his own obstinacy in not acknowledging the act, not for death inflicted either in duel, with proper witnesses, or in hot and accidental strife, but for deliberate murder, with all the aggravations of concealment and denial. The burying of the body, the leaving it there in unconsecrated ground, the appearing at the court with a bold and innocent face, all these are bitter aggra-

vations. But, I ask again, has he confessed the deed? Did he show any sign of such intention when the sentence was announced to him?"

"Alas! no, sire," replied the Prince: "he has in no shape confessed; but the sentence has not yet been read to him, as it wants your majesty's confirmation."

"Then let it be at once confirmed," said the King. "My determination is taken—my mind made up, Francis."

"I beg your gracious pardon, sire," said Father Willand, interposing, "but before you pronounce finally, hear me too. Your royal son has spoken as becomes a prince; your daughter has sued as a woman, and I come to talk as a priest."

"I believe, under such circumstances, my good father," said Henry, with a faint smile, "you ought, according to rule, to send me your admonitions through one of my chaplains."

"What! trust a purse with a pickpocket!" exclaimed the priest; his usual jesting bitterness mingling strangely with the tone of deep feeling in which he spoke. "No, no, sire, the admonitions would slip through their fingers by the way. Whenever your majesty wants to do a real act of charity, do it yourself; don't trust to an almoner. I, in my priestly capacity, do as I would have you do in your kingly one, and, therefore, I beseech you, hear my admonitions from my own mouth; I would not have them tainted by the breath of any other man."

"Well, well, speak then," replied the King. "It shall never be said that I refused to hear. What have you to say in this youth's favour, why the law of the land should not take its course?"

"In his favour I have very little to say," replied the priest; "for, indeed, there is very little to be said in the favour of any living man. We are all pups of one litter, blind and stupid when we are young, and snarling and vicious when we are old; but what I have to say is a warning to your majesty. What will you think of yourself and your present obstinacy, should this young man not be guilty? If, entertaining doubts of his being the real person who did the deed, as I know you do, you resist all prayers and entreaties in his favour, and send him to the scaffold, what will be your feelings should you afterwards find out that he was not the man? How will you reproach yourself then?"

"The impartial judges of the land," replied Henry, somewhat sternly, "have pronounced him guilty. If there be a fault, the fault is theirs—not mine."

"Think you, sire," said the priest, "that in purgatory those judges will make you a low bow, and beg to have your share of fire as well as their own? With whom, sire," he continued, in a still bolder voice—"with whom rests the power to save or to destroy? and why is that power trusted by God unto a king? Inasmuch, and solely inasmuch, as it is needful to have one to moderate the rigour of the law. The law must entertain no doubt. It either acquits or it condemns; but still reason may have a doubt, and it is for that that kings are invested with the glorious privilege of mercy. I tell you, sire, that, more than at any other time, you prove the divine origin of your power when you exercise it to save; for, in communicating to you the means of showing mercy, God himself gave you a share of his brightest attribute. If, I say, if you have no doubt of his guilt, send him to the scaffold; for your firm conviction, as an upright judge, shall justify you in the eye of Heaven. But if, after having first heard the cause yourself, and read every word of the evidence that has been given, you do entertain a doubt, exercise the right of showing mercy, or prepare for long and bitter self-reproach in this world, and for the punishment of blood-guiltiness in the next."

"Your words are very bold, priest," replied the King, sharply; "and this scene must never be repeated. But, as we have entered on the subject, I will demand what motive, what reason, I have to suppose that this young man is not guilty? Was it because my own eye did not see him strike the blow? Was it because others did not see him? If so, who would ever be convicted?—for the more cool and deliberate the murderer is, the more care does he take to conceal the deed, the more skilfully does he contrive to veil himself. The practised assassin—the prudent, thoughtful, careful villain—would escape, and none but less practised murderers would fall, if we always required ocular proof of guilt. Why then, I say, why then should I, in the slightest degree, doubt that the sentence which has been passed is just? What should I judge from, but the strong evidence of guilt which has been given?"

"From his whole life, sire," replied the priest. "There is, as you admit, a gap in the evidence against him; an interval to be filled up by imagination—with materials chosen from probabilities. Why choose the evil probabilities, and reject the good? Why judge from a few hasty words that passed before, and refuse credit to the witness of a noble life?"

"My good father," replied the King, "I wish that in common justice I could found any belief in the young man's

innocence upon that which you would adduce in his behalf. True, in Italy he has served well and nobly. True, his character for generosity, courage, truth, and humanity have stood high; and, to show you how willing I have been to give him every advantage of that character, I will tell you that, foreseeing the painful decision to which I must come, I sent private messengers of my own to inquire into all his proceedings, and, alas! the accumulation of charges against him from various sources throws down a weight in the scale of his guilt which overbalances far his previous good reputation. In the mountains I find him consorting with brigands and the wild daring freebooters, whom long years of war and calamity have caused to rise up in Savoy. I find him contracting a clandestine marriage contrary to what he knew was right. I find him in the town of Lyons openly deprecating the execution of the laws upon the convicted heretic, Jamets. So much so, indeed, that an order for his arrest and imprisonment had been given the next day by the proper officers of the town, before it was known he had quitted the city. Then came this dark transaction; then his drawing his sword upon the Count de Meyrand within the precincts of the palace, and contrary to my express and repeated prohibition."

"But, sire," said the Dauphin, "I assured your majesty before ——"

"You told me, Francis," said the King, "that this unhappy gentleman was out with you on some foolish expedition, when the affair with Meyrand took place; but you told me also, that you did not know which had first drawn; that, not expecting such an event, you had not remarked the facts. These are but separate things, it is true; but the whole acts as a counterpoise to any doubts in his favour which his previous character might have inspired; and I feel that, in justice to my subjects, and in the exercise of that authority for which I am responsible to God, I am bound not to interfere with the course of the law, nor even to move a finger to save him from the death awarded to him. I have done enough already, in sparing him the question, and I will do no more. His only hope of any mitigation lies in a full confession and explanation of every circumstance. Let the sentence be read to him, and he shall then have eight-and-forty hours to make his statement or to prepare for death."

Father Willand turned away without another word, seeing that the king was inexorable; but the Dauphin paused, saying, "I trust at all events, sire, that you will commute the punishment to the axe;" and seeing the King shake his head, he

added, "Consider, sire, the degradation and disgrace to the whole noble family of Rohan,"

"The disgrace is in the act, not in the punishment," replied the King: "I will not change the law.—Claude," he continued, turning to his daughter, "this makes you sad. You should not mingle with such things. They are not fit for women. Men's hearts, hard as they are, have enough to do to bear them."

"It was the misery of that poor girl, Isabel, sire," replied the Princess, "that made me come to your majesty. She wished to see you herself, but I said I would plead for her."

"Let her not come, Claude—let her not stir from Nogent," said the King. "It will but be painful to her and to me, for I must refuse her. In this business, nothing will move me. So inform her, and do your best to soothe and comfort her."

"There are wounds that have no balm, sir," replied the Princess, "and I fear hers is one of them."

Thus saying, she, too, turned away, and with the Dauphin bent her steps back towards the palace. Ere they had gone far, however, they heard the voice of the King raised and pronouncing the name of "Father Willand," who by this time was at some distance. The Dauphin called to him, and sent him back to the monarch, saying, as the good priest passed, "Speak more gently, father, to him, but press it still. He may yet relent."

Father Willand bent his head, and walked on without reply to the spot where Henry stood.

It might be that he expected some fresh rebuke for the boldness of his words, but the King spoke in a mild tone, saying, "Now listen to me, my good father: I am about to say to you what I would not say before those young people. If I did not know you to be an honest and good man, I might be taught to judge very harshly of you, for you have many enemies, and yourself at the head of them. However, to return to what we were speaking of but now: you imagine that I have a doubt in my mind as to this unhappy man's guilt. I must now tell you that I have none, and your words have produced no difference. It is my firm and unalterable conviction that his hand slew Henry of Brienne. The question as to whether it was or was not in casual strife between two angry men, he has himself refused to answer, and, therefore, the consequences be upon his own head. I will give him one more chance, however. Go to him yourself from me. Tell him that you have authority to offer him pardon in case of his confessing the offence, and that he can

truly and sincerely aver, that it was an accidental quarrel which produced such results. Let him in any way show this to be the case, and he shall be pardoned. Moreover, let him not think that by such a confession alone, he loses the hand of Isabel of Brienne, for let him be assured the sentence shall be executed against him if he does not confess; and he must remember that, even had not this unhappy business occurred, I had sworn by my honour her hand should never be his, on account of the business between him and Meyrand. Let him, then, under these circumstances losing nothing, and gaining all by confession, without any other hope of life but that, acknowledge freely and fairly the deed that he has done, and give me some excuse at least for mercy."

"I go, sire," replied the priest, "to fulfil your majesty's commands; but forgive me if I say that I know it will be in vain. My conviction is, that he is altogether innocent; and if so, I know him too well to suppose that he will acknowledge guilt."

"Go," said the King, "go at all events. It is his only hope of life, and if he still refuses, let me hear no more petitions. The act, as I said before, be upon his own head!"

Thus saying, the King turned away, but the priest followed him, saying, "Your majesty has forgotten one important point. To a prisoner of such consequence, not even my character will obtain admission for me. They will let me in willingly enough to common felons, robbers, and murderers, but were I to go and ask entrance to see a noble of the first class, charged with and condemned for such a crime, the gaolers would drive me back with derision."

"You shall have an order, you shall have an order," said the King. "Come with me to the palace," and walking on with a quick step, he drew the order himself in one of the lower halls of the Louvre, and placed it in the hands of Father Willand.

In those days a refinement of precaution did not require that the orders of even an absolute monarch should be always countersigned by his secretary of state; and Father Willand, not trusting the paper he possessed to any one, hastened onward towards the prison of the Châtelet. By this time, the sun had gone down, and the gay people of the capital were all hurrying hither and thither towards their homes. At the corner of one of the streets, however, which led up from the Seine, the priest's robes brushed against a tall powerful man, dressed well, and even splendidly, as far as the dark nature of his habiliments would permit. Father Willand, in his

eagerness, noted him not, but the stranger turned round and stopped him, by laying his hand upon his shoulder.

"Ha, chevalier!" said the priest, "is it you? Why, when came you hither! Have you heard all these bad tidings?"

"I know them as you your breviary," said Corse de Leon; "I have watched the whole events. But whither go you now? I want to speak with you."

"I am bound upon an errand from the King to the prisoner," replied the priest. "I am to tell him that his last and only hope for mercy is in confession."

"Confession!" cried de Leon, with a scoff: "think you that he will confess? But go on your way, go on your way, good father, and meet me an hour hence under the arcade of the Cordeliers, before you return to the King. I have much to say to you, very much, for something remains to be done, and there is but little time to do it."

Thus saying, he walked on, and the priest pursued his way.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"I AM sorry for you, young gentleman," said the deep hoarse voice of Bertrand Saar, as he stood at the door of the dungeon to which Bernard de Rohan had been consigned after his sentence was determined, though that sentence had not yet been announced to him—"I am sorry for you; for good Father Willand, who sometimes comes here to see the poor folks, told me much about you. What can I do to help you? Will you have wine?"

"I thank you for your kindness, my good friend," replied Bernard de Rohan, calmly, "but I will take no wine. If you could give me ink and paper, indeed, to write, that I should greatly prize; and as I have nothing to say, that the whole world may not see, you can do no wrong in letting me have them."

"There is no order against it," replied the man; "though it is the first time I was ever asked for such a thing here. But you shall have it;" and thus saying, he withdrew.

Some minutes elapsed before the key turned in the lock again, and the prisoner, who sat meditating, with his arm leaning on the small table by the lamp, looked up, expecting to see the gaoler once more. It was not so, however; for the first thing he saw was a priest's vestments, and then.

shading his eyes from the light, he recognised Father Willand. Oh, who can tell the joy and the delight that the sight of a familiar face will sometimes produce in moments of solitary pain and dark despondency! Bernard de Rohan started up, and grasped the good man's hand, reiterating again and again how happy he was to see him.

"My son," said the priest, "I come to bring you a message which offers you life, but upon one condition."

"Then, of course, I am condemned," said Bernard de Rohan. "I have not yet heard my sentence; but I guessed its nature from the change which they have made in the place of my confinement. Till this morning they kept me in the tower; but after appearing before the judges again today, and hearing the papers read from Bourg and other places, I was brought down hither—as if to prepare me for death," he added, with a smile, "by placing me living in the grave."

"I fear your sentence is pronounced," said the priest, "and that it is death; but yet—Bernard, but yet, my poor young friend—there is one means by which you can escape your fate. The King, as I have said, upon one condition promises you pardon; but it is a condition which I know not whether you will accede to. Yet, before you reject it, Bernard, think of poor Isabel, and recollect that the only comfort, the only happiness she can now have in life, is to know that you live, even if you live not for her."

"But what is the condition?" demanded Bernard de Rohan. "There is scarcely aught on earth that I would refuse to do, which could give her comfort or relief for a moment, were it to work as a slave at the galleys, to dig in the dark mine, or to live far from my own land, without hope or comfort—I would not hesitate even for a moment, could it but give her peace."

"The condition is," said the priest, "that you confess the act of which you are accused. Such is the King's final message and determination. Life, if you confess! Death, if you deny!"

"What!" exclaimed Bernard de Rohan, "confess a falsehood? Confess what I have never committed? No, no!" he continued, starting up indignantly, and casting his hands abroad—"no, no! Truth is the only possession I have left. Their sentence may take from me rank, and territories, and reputation, and life itself; but my truth they cannot touch. That is above their might. That is God's own and mine; and nothing they can do can wring from me that

bright and best possession which has gone with me from the cradle until now, shall outlive this body, and triumph over the grave itself. Let them, if they will, stretch me upon the rack, or break me upon the wheel, they shall hear no cry, no groan. The tortured limb may writhe, the weak fibre may quiver, but my truth is beyond the iron or the cord, and that they cannot shake. Speak not to me of it, father; speak not of it. Thank the king for his grace and kindness. Tell him that I forgive him, and all my judges, for there was much matter to deceive them; but add, that he is mistaken in supposing that Bernard de Rohan would tell a lie, even to save himself from the most painful death. Tell him I hold the privilege of truth far higher than that of living! And now, father," he continued, "let us turn our thoughts to other things. Death is to be my portion. Let me prepare for it, both as regards this world and as regards another."

"Not now," replied the priest—"not now. I will return to you, I promise. At present I must go back to the King. But fear not, I will return."

"I would fain say what I have to say, even now, good father," replied Bernard de Rohan. "Since I have returned to this fair realm of France, I have seen so many a just expectation trodden under foot by fate, so many a fair hope blasted, that you cannot wonder I should no longer calculate upon the event of even the next minute. You may not be able to return; and what I have to say of this world's things, at least, will take but short space.—When I am dead, bear my last words to Isabel: tell her I loved her to the last —with that love which mingles easily with the thoughts of heaven: tell her, that though I know she must grieve, yet I beseech her to grieve calmly; and though from her heart I am sure she will mourn me, yet not to mourn, if possible, with persevering sadness. Let her seek all consolation that may be. She will not love any as well as she has loved me; and my affection must not be a selfish one. Above all things, tell her that I died innocent; and beseech her to take all means, to use every effort, to discover the murderer of her brother; for that murderer will one day be convicted, and my name cleared. I have my suspicions; but they are but suspicions; and I will not — must not — give them utterance. Suffice it that I am innocent; and to witness that I am so, I adjure that all-seeing Judge, into whose bright presence I shall soon be called. Tell her likewise—— But whom have we here?"

The door of the dungeon had been opened while the young

cavalier was speaking, and two men in black robes appeared, following the gaoler.

"I suppose you come to tell me, sirs," continued Bernard de Rohan, "that my firm maintenance of the truth must conduct me to the torture. So be it, if it must be: my tongue shall never betray my innocence. Lead on where you will —I am ready to follow."

"You mistake, sir," said one of the men. "We come to summon you to the hall of the great Châtelet, to hear your sentence read: that is all. It is the King's will that you should hear it this night. You must prepare your mind for the worst, however."

"I know all that can befal me," replied the prisoner, "and am ready to endure it. The sentence, of course, is death. It is unmerited; and yet I do not arraign it. Perchance, had I been a judge, appearances might have made me decide as wrongly. Lead on!—Good father, see me again before I die."

Thus saying, Bernard de Rohan grasped Father Willand's hand, and, with one of the ushers on either side, walked forth into the corridor, where a small body of archers, with their partisans in their hands, waited to guard him through the streets.

It was now dark, but the torches carried before the unhappy cavalier gathered together a number of boys and idlers to run along by the side of the soldiers, and gaze at the face of the prisoner. Other parties, too, passing along on foot, crossed the path of the archers more than once, with flambeaux flashing against the walls, as some gay lord of the court proceeded to this or that merry scene; and more than once Bernard de Rohan caught sight of some well-remembered face, which recognised him not even by a look.

At length, however, the gates of the great Châtelet were reached, and in a few minutes the prisoner was in the hall where his judges were seated. When he entered, he heard the deep tones of the president pronouncing sentence on a common felon, whose piteous lamentations from time to time interrupted the awful words which sentenced him to be broken limb by limb upon the wheel. When they were spoken, he was dragged away in the midst of vain petitions; and another was brought up, who heard the same decree in dogged silence, without word, or cry, or tear, or look of terror, and strode calmly away to meet the fate he had probably calculated on long before.

At length the name of Bernard de Rohan was pronounced,

and the president addressed to him nearly the same terrible words.

Though he had expected death, there were parts of the sentence which seemed to surprise and trouble him. "What!" he exclaimed, "have I heard you right, sir? To be degraded of my rank—to lose my knighthood—to fall by an infamous punishment which extends its dark spot to all my kindred?"

"Even so, Monsieur de Rohan," said the president, in a sorrowful voice: "it can be no otherwise. Judged guilty of a crime to which the law awards such punishments, we have nothing to do but to pronounce that sentence."

Bernard de Rohan gazed down upon the pavement for a moment or two in silence, deep, bitter, despairing. His hands had fallen clasped before him, and remained motionless. His fine head drooped upon his bosom; and the light of the lamps above pouring upon him, displayed, perhaps, as stern and terrible a picture of mental anguish triumphing for a moment over firm determination, as ever was beheld by the eye of man—that eye which, in the awful struggle that has gone on for ages between good and evil, has looked upon a mass of agony, sorrow, and despair, which, could it all be beheld at once, or conceived even faintly, would break man's heart for the wickedness and cruelty of his own nature. The next moment, however, he raised his head again: it seemed as if for him the bitterness of death was passed, and his spirit had recovered all its firmness.

"It is over," he said, speaking to himself—"it is over!" and turning to the judges, he added, "Your sentence is pronounced, and I must bear it. The last hope has passed away from my heart, the hope of dying, if not as becomes my innocence, at least as becomes my rank, and as becomes one who has fought, not ingloriously, for his country. This expectation, like all others, has passed away, and I am ready to endure all that you, in your erring judgment, can inflict. My innocence you cannot take from me: nor, strong in that innocence, can you disgrace me, for no one can disgrace me but myself, and that I will never do. Others, however, you may injure. Those who, as innocent as myself, have no stain upon their name, will feel that which you inflict upon me as a stain that can never be effaced. I grieve for them, not for myself. One half hour's agony can easily be endured, when at the end comes peace, tranquillity, and reward for all suffering. To the living, however, you are responsible for the deeds that you do to me; and the time

will come when, the truth being discovered, those whom you now wrong so bitterly, will call for the reversal of your sentence, will restore my name to honour, and may, perhaps, call for retribution upon those who too rashly and too hastily pronounced an innocent man guilty where there was reasonable doubt, and awarded the extreme of punishment when there was no absolute proof of criminality. I say it not to threaten you—May God forgive you!—May man forgive you also, and, from my very heart I say, I forgive you too!"

Thus speaking, Bernard de Rohan turned to leave the judgment-hall.

The ushers were by his side in a moment, and the guards again surrounded him at the door. As they issued forth from the Châtelet, however, and once more entered the streets, they came upon a number of advocates and people of the robe, who were crowding into the building to hear the judgments pronounced. A slight movement took place at that instant amongst the persons who were conveying the prisoner back to his dungeon, and he thought he heard a voice whisper, "Take courage!" At the same time, one of the advocates catching a sight of his face, said aloud, "It is Monsieur de Rohan." A number of people who were standing round the door heard the words, and many of them ran along by the side of the line of soldiers, as they proceeded towards the prison, eagerly striving to catch a view of the captive as he was hurried forward in the midst.

As the torchlight fell upon the crowd of faces, gazing through upon him between the archers, Bernard de Rohan thought that he saw looks of sympathy and sorrow, rather than scorn and reprobation, and a momentary thought of attempting to escape crossed his mind. As yet he was not fettered. He knew that on his return to the prison, as a condemned criminal, such would be the case. The thought of the abhorred iron strengthened the wish and the purpose of flight; and at the same moment a shout, which he heard amongst the people, and a curse or two at the archers who guarded him, seemed to show that at the while such ideas were passing through his mind a desire to help and deliver him had taken possession of the crowd.

Before he could make even the slightest attempt to effect his escape, however, the very shout which expressed the people's sympathy brought up a fresh body of armed men, who drove back the populace, and filled every gap in the line of soldiers around him. The people recoiled; but undaunted

by the threats of the armed men, they followed toward the little Châtelet in increasing numbers. There was no one to lead them, however; and before they could find any person to assume such an office, the party of police had reached the gloomy building where they were to deliver their prisoner once more into the hands of his gaolers.

At the first signal the doors were thrown open. The troop marched in, the massive gates closed behind them; and—after pausing for a minute or two, to talk over what had occurred, to vow that the young lord was as innocent as day, and to regret not having done a thousand things to effect his liberation—the persons composing the crowd began to drop away. Many of the more resolute remained to see the soldiers come forth again; and there was a considerable crowd round the gates of the Châtelet when the archers and ushers once more appeared, which was scarcely five minutes after their entrance. The archers, who were in high disrepute at that time, did not escape without some hooting; and stones were also thrown. The people were dispersed, however, in a minute; and the soldiers separating, pursued the fugitives in various directions, while the ushers betook themselves, each to his path, according as business or inclination directed him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

With a heavy heart good Father Willand left Bernard de Rohan, when, as we have shown, the prisoner went to hear his sentence read at the hall of the great Châtelet. It was not, however, towards the palace of the Louvre, as he had led Bernard de Rohan to imagine, that Father Willand turned his steps. Thither, indeed, he intended ultimately to go; but he had thought it no crime so far to deceive his young friend, as to conceal from him, under the excuse of seeing the King, that he was about to return in haste to Corse de Leon, in the hope of devising some means—however vague might be his notion thereof—for delivering the prisoner from the hands of those who held him in bondage. Some foundation had been afforded to such a hope by the words which Corse de Leon had spoken. He had said that something remained to be done, though there was but little time to do it; and however wild and rash might be the supposition,

Father Willand's confidence in the Brigand's extraordinary resources led him to believe that Bernard's deliverance might really be effected.

He took his way, then, in haste towards a convent of Cordeliers, which at that time occupied nearly two-thirds of a street leading from the Place de Grève towards the Rue St. Antoine. A large arcade surrounded two sides of the building, which formed the angle of that street and another, and under it had been the appointed place of meeting. There was a lamp over one of the chief doors of the convent, but it gave but a faint and inconsiderable light; and Father Willand, after pursuing his way from one end of the arcade to the other, fancied that he must have missed seeing the person whom he sought in the darkness which reigned under the arches. He retrod his steps, however, examining well every pillar and every corner, but Corse de Leon was not there; and supposing that he had himself come before the time, the good priest continued to walk up and down under the arcade for a full hour. He then became uneasy, especially as he knew that his return would be expected by the King; and after pausing for a short time longer, and looking round again and again in vain, he took his way towards the palace, where he was instantly admitted to Henry's cabinet.

"What news? what news, priest?" demanded Henry, eagerly, turning from a conversation which he was holding with Monsieur de Vieilleville and another gentleman. "Has he confessed the crime?"

"No, sire," replied Father Willand, "he has not confessed it, and never will, for he is innocent."

The King frowned upon him, but replied nothing. Turning, however, to Monsieur de Vieilleville, he said, "On that one point you have conquered, De Vieilleville. We must not disgust and alienate so many of our high nobility. On all other points, I am firm, but I yield that; and no more can be demanded of me.—Go back to the prisoner, father," he said, addressing Father Willand, "and tell him that, not out of compassion for himself, but out of consideration for the many noble families to which he is allied, and of all the branches of the princely house of Rohan, I have determined to grant him the privilege of the axe, that he may not die the death of a common felon. But let him know that his execution is ordered to take place in the court of the Châtelet at daybreak to-morrow morning, and exhort him to use his short space diligently to make his peace with God, which can only be done by a confession of his crimes."

The priest made no reply, for he saw that the King's mood was unusually stern; but, hastening back to the prison, he demanded once more to see the prisoner. The lieutenant happened to be standing near the gate at the moment, receiving the keys for the night, for it was now near eleven o'clock; and Bertrand Saar, in the presence of his superior officer, assumed a sullen harshness to Father Willand, telling him that he had come too late, and could not have admission.

At the sight of the King's order, however, the lieutenant commanded the gaoler of the lower prison to lead the way instantly to the dungeon, and followed himself with the priest, inquiring with sly and insinuating questions what was the King's ultimate determination regarding the prisoner. Father Willand replied as briefly as might be, for his mind was full of his sad task; and with heavy brow and cast-down eyes, he walked on, venting occasionally the bitter feelings of his heart in some sarcastic sally, murmured between his teeth, at laws, and kings, and society, and human nature.

At length, through the long dark corridors, lighted but faintly on their way by the dim lantern of Bertrand Saar, they reached the door of Bernard de Rohan's dungeon, and the gaoler paused sullenly, demanding the keys from the lieutenant of the governor, who still held them in his hand. The one which was first given proved not to be the right one, and snatching somewhat roughly the whole bunch from the hand of his superior, the gaoler applied another to the lock, which immediately opened the door.

The priest advanced to go in, as Bertrand Saar drew the heavy door back; but before he had taken a step into the dungeon, the exclamation of "Where is the prisoner?" caused the governor and the gaoler both to start forward.

There stood upon the table, the small dim lamp; there, appeared untouched the food which had been given as the refreshment for the night; there lay the book of prayers which had been the companion of Bernard de Rohan's hours during the past day; but he himself was not to be seen!

The lieutenant rushed to the side of the low bed, as if he thought the prisoner might be hidden amongst its scanty clothing, and then turned furiously upon the priest, exclaiming, "By the Holy Mother, this is your doing, and you shall suffer for it!"

"Man, you are mad," replied Father Willand. "Do you think that I would come here, by the King's order, to seek a man I had helped to escape?"

"You were with him this night before," cried the lieutenant. "You were with him long."

"And left him in the hands of the archers to conduct him to the hall of the great Châtelet," replied Father Willand. "When the wolf broke into the sheep-fold he was the first to call out, Murder! and, by your wishing to lay it upon me, I suppose you have taken a bribe to set him free yourself."

The lieutenant then turned with the same fierceness upon Bertrand Saar; and though the man was gazing upon him with a look of horror and astonishment at the event which had taken place—an event which was only known to have happened once before since the Châtelet had been a prison—he proceeded to accuse the turnkey of having aided and abetted the prisoner's escape. Bertrand Saar, however, repelled the charge, and, with as much anger and indignation as the accuser himself displayed, insinuated something very much to the same effect as the suspicion which Father Willand had expressed.

"He could prove," he said, "that he had never left his post in the small room near the gate: there were three other turnkeys with him the whole time. He had never given up his keys to any one for a moment, except when the archers brought back the prisoner, and then had sent his man to open the door of the dungeon. The keys were brought back to him instantly," he said, "as soon as the prisoner was shut in, and nobody else had ever the opportunity of opening that door, unless the lieutenant himself gave his own general key."

The lieutenant, on his part, raged and stormed; vowed that it might cost him his post, and even his life itself; caused the priest to be detained, Bertrand Saar to be deprived of his keys, and held in durance; examined and cross-examined the inferior turnkey, who had locked Bernard de Rohan in for the night; but it was all in vain. The turnkey described how the prisoner had been taken to the great Châtelet for judgment; how he had been brought back again under a strong body of archers, and accompanied by several ushers and exempts; how the ushers had placed him in the dungeon, and even gone in with him to make all secure; and how he had locked the door upon him, and left it exactly in the same state in which it was found. He, too, proved that he had given up his keys to Bertrand Saar the moment that the thing was done, and had never returned to the dungeon afterwards.

All still remained doubt and mystery; and the lieutenant leaving the prison in a state of confusion such as had seldom

been known within its walls, hastened as fast as possible to the great Châtelet, where he found some of the archers who had escorted the prisoner back to his dungeon still on duty. They confirmed in every part the story of the under-turnkey; and one of the ushers being called out of his bed, told exactly the same tale, and declared that the escape of the prisoner must have been connived at by some of the officers of the gaol.

In the meantime there arrived from the palace an order for the execution of the prisoner at daybreak on the following morning; and it became necessary to rouse the proper officers of the city, and to make the King aware that his commands could not be obeyed. Every means were employed in the course of that night and the following day, both to discover how the fugitive had effected his exit from the prison, and to trace the course of his flight; but every effort was vain. Not the slightest vestige could be found to show how he had passed or whither he had gone; and the matter remained in as much obscurity and mystery as ever.

The King, from his own personal knowledge of Father Willand's proceedings, ordered him to be set at liberty immediately. At the same time, however, from a suspicion that he might have been instrumental in bribing the governor of the prison, he commanded him not to appear at court, but immediately to return to the cure which had been given him near the frontiers of Savoy.

"Tell his majesty," said Father Willand to the usher who brought him these commands, "that he has shown me the highest favour he could show; for I would rather, a great deal, live amongst the wolves and foxes upon four legs than amongst those upon two. I shall be safer there, too," he added, "amongst my flock, though I have not much of the mutton in my own nature; for here the beasts of prey eat one another; but there, wolf is safe from wolf, and fox from fox. Tell his majesty that I shall not be long in this great stone ant-hill; and when he wishes to make me a bishop, he will find me for the future within twenty leagues of Chambery."

It was not, however, towards the frontiers of Savoy that good Father Willand took his way in the first place. He did not, it is true, deviate so far as to be accused of disobeying the King's command; for, early on the morning of the following day, he mounted his mule, and, with his stock of clothing in a valise behind him, he ambled quietly on upon the road to Fontainbleau.

At Melun, however, he turned from the highway, and chose the smaller road leading towards Nogent; riding on till he came to a spot where, in the midst of a flat and somewhat uninteresting country, there lies a sweet little valley filled with rich vegetation and varied by some romantic scenery of dell, and cliff, and rock, and forest. A small stream wanders through it, winding along its bright, but slow, course towards the Seine; and at one of the bends of the river is a little church, with a village surrounding it consisting of many scattered cottages, each with its neat garden and its blushing patch of vines.

By the time that Father Willand reached this hamlet, his mule, which had accomplished a longer journey that day than probably it had ever made before, showed the strongest disposition in the world to stop; and in this point the good priest gratified him; for there was a shade of grey in the sky, slightly tinged with pink, which plainly intimated that day was nearly at an end. Taking his path straight to the abode of the curé, Father Willand, as was then very customary, demanded, as a matter of course, shelter and entertainment for the night. It was granted with perfect readiness; and after resting there for some ten hours, and by his jests and gaiety amusing and astonishing not a little his host, who was a plain good man of very moderate intellect, the good priest mounted his mule again in the grey of the morning, and rode onward five or six miles farther in the valley.

The village and its inhabitants, their gardens and their vineyards, were, by this time, left far behind him; and instead, there grew, on either side of the road, tall beech trees and oaks, starting up with very little underwood, and stretching out thin and slender, as if to catch all those rays of the sun which were lost before they reached the bottom of the valley. A cottage or two appeared, it is true, from time to time; but they were only the scattered habitations of the woodman or the fisherman who tended the neighbouring forest, or who caught the fine trout in the stream that flowed beside the road, and sent them to the markets of Melun and Fontainbleau. Presently, however, appeared a massive grey wall, stretching along one side of the road, and thence sweeping up into the wood, as if surrounding some extensive domain, or separating one portion of the forest from another. About half a mile farther were seen a pair of heavy iron gates, through the bars of which the eye could trace a long straight avenue, with a collection of towers and turrets gathered together into the form of a house at the extreme end. Father

Willand strove to obtain admission here, but in vain; and he then rode on to another gate, where he was more successful, a stout porter, with a broad belt and sword, and a cock's feather in his hat, opening the gates for him, seeming to recognise him at once.

"Ah, good Father Willand, I am glad you are come," said the porter: "you will find our young lady sadly broken-hearted. She has done nothing but weep for this many a day. I hope you will be able to give her comfort."

"I shall, I shall," replied Father Willand: "I am a man of comfort. I bring her good news, my friend. Has any one been here before me?"

"None with any good news, father," replied the porter. "That Italian vagabond, the Lord of Masseran, was here two days ago, with a train big enough to have taken up the château and carried it away altogether; but I spoke to him through the grate, and told him the King's commands, that my young lady was not to be disturbed by any one. So then he sent up a boy with a message, demanding to speak with her, but she refused to see him, saying, "that if her lady-mother were there, she would gladly see her, but would not see the Lord of Masseran."

"What said he, then?" demanded the priest.

"He muttered between his teeth," answered the porter; "and talked something about convents, that I did not well understand. But I would fain hear what the good news is, father; for I am sure, anything that is good news for her, sweet lady, is good news for us all."

"Her ears shall hear it first, my son," replied the priest; "but it is something that will make her heart glad, and that is sufficient."

Thus saying, he rode on across the park, which was, in fact, a piece of forest ground, separated from the rest of the wood, in former days, by one of the lords of Brienne for the purposes of the chase. It was full of fallow and roe deer; and many a one bounded away into the underwood as the priest rode on, or stood gazing at him from a distance, in the dim, silent shade of the trees, while he pursued his way over the open ground in the mellow autumn sunshine.

All was still and quiet, with the peculiar stillness of that season of the year, when the birds have lost their song, and the insect tribe have generally ended their short life, and everything seemed to partake of the calm and silent melancholy which waits upon the passing away of the bright things of the summer. The château itself had the same tone. It

stood cold and grey upon its own little platform, without flower or shrub, or any other thing, to break the line of its walls and towers, or to hide the spot where the stone-work rose from the earth. The very clear morning sunshine made it look the more sad; and a long shadow fell from it, like that which some deep and terrible bereavement casts over the rest of life. The great door in the midst was wide open, giving a view through a stone paved hall, into the court beyond. No eager domestics were seen moving about. No gay voices were heard speaking; though one saw, from the opened windows, and the neat order of all around, that the place was fully tenanted; but all was clear, and cold, and calm, like a heart from which passion, and hope, and an interest in the world's things have passed away for ever.

Father Willand dismounted, and fastening his mule to the ring at the side of the door, knocked loudly for admission. In a moment, an attendant came out from a room where he had been sitting silent, and welcomed the good priest gladly.

"Where is your lady?" demanded Father Willand.

"She is walking alone, father," replied the man, "in the wood, up there upon the hill."

"See to my mule, my son," said the priest, in reply: "I must go up and speak with your lady, for I bring her good tidings."

"Thank God for that," said the man; and passing straight through the château, and the court behind, Father Willand took his way towards a tall grove of trees which crowned the gentle rise to the eastward. Thither, however, we must precede him.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

In deep grief and agony of mind, not to be told, Isabel de Brienne had passed the time since the arrest of Bernard de Rohan. She had remained indeed, at Fontainbleau only a few hours after he had been carried to the Châtelet; for Henry, partly out of kindness, and in order to remove her from scenes where everything must be fertile of anguish to her heart, and partly to avoid solicitations and entreaties which he had predetermined not to grant, had commanded her to retire to the hunting-lodge of her family near Nogent, and not to quit it for the next month. He had taken every precaution, however, to guard her from intrusion and annoy-

ance, and had strictly ordered that no one should be permitted to pass the gates of the park till her sanction had been obtained.

Everything else that he could do to contribute to her comfort he had done. Old servants had been assembled in haste from different parts of the country, and he had withheld, as far as possible, all the painful proceedings against Bernard de Rohan from her ears.

She had petitioned to be permitted to visit him in prison, but this had been sternly refused; and an intimation had also been given, that no such request must be made again. She had petitioned also to see the King, but that prayer was rejected likewise. She had no resource, then, but to weep; and her whole time had been passed in wandering through the park, and in thinking with grief, or rather with despair, of past happiness and present sorrow. In nothing that she beheld did she find pleasure or relief. The face of nature, once so dear to her, was now all dark and cloudy; the sunshine and the storm were equally cheerless; the changing hour and varying season attracted no attention, diverted not her thoughts for a moment. Well might she have used the beautiful words of the poet:—

> "No more shall the spring my lost pleasures restore,
> Uncheer'd I still wander alone;
> And sunk in dejection, for ever deplore
> The sweets of the days that are gone.
>
> "While the sun as he rises to others shines bright,
> I think how he formerly shone;
> Where others cull blossoms, I find but a blight,
> And sigh for the days that are gone."

Most deeply did Isabel feel the truth of the comparison between light and happiness—how the colours of all that we look upon in life, as well as their brightness, depends upon the sunshine from our own hearts, rather than upon their intrinsic qualities—how everything in the night of sorrow and despair is dim, and grey, and comfortless. In none of all those things wherein she had formerly found enjoyment could she now even conceive that there was pleasure. She would suffer none to accompany her; the human voice had grown odious to her ear. As she walked, her eyes were for ever bent down upon the ground, that she might not see the fair things of nature, and the brightness which seemed so discordant to her heart.

She was thus wandering on, with those beautiful eyes still unexhausted of their tears, when the step of Father Willand

caught her ear. She did not look up, however, for she thought that the person who approached was only one of her attendants, come to offer her words of unwelcome consolation, or still more unwelcome remonstrance.

"Look up, lady! look up!" said the priest, in a quick, gay tone. "If you so water the ground with tears, we shall have such a crop of sorrows grow up as will break the hearts of all France. The nightingale sings at night and the skylark in the morning. However rough and rugged may be the winter's day, spring comes at last: the sun looks out; and the world laughs."

"Alas! my good father," replied Isabel, recognising the voice, "I shall never laugh again;" but as she raised her eyes with a slow and despairing look towards his face, there was something in his countenance—a meaning smile, an expression of satisfaction—that made her heart thrill, and her whole frame tremble.

"He is pardoned! he is pardoned!" she exclaimed, darting forward to meet the priest. "Oh, father, tell me that he is pardoned!"

"Not exactly," answered Father Willand; "but what is quite as good—he has made his escape, and I trust is somewhere over the frontier by this time."

Isabel sank on her knees where she stood, and clasping her hands together, with her eyes raised towards heaven, she exclaimed, "Merciful God be praised!" and then bending down her head without rising, she buried her eyes in her hands, and wept long and convulsively.

The priest tried to soothe and to raise her, but she gently put away his hand, murmuring, "It is joy and thankfulness!"

After a time, however, she became calm; and rising, without speaking, she leaned upon the good man's arm, and slowly took her way back to the château. They were both silent; but when she entered the dwelling where she had lately passed so many hours of misery, when she crossed the threshold of the room where she had sat, with nothing but despair at heart, in expectation of the last sad stroke of all, the contrast overpowered her, and again she wept profusely.

But her tears were now more calm; and after awhile she gladly heard all that Father Willand had to tell, putting many a question, and making him repeat more than once the tale of his finding the dungeon empty of its tenant. Every particular, too, of Bernard de Rohan's last interview with the priest she asked eagerly, and listened to as if her life had depended on each word.

Between his answers she paused and pondered over what he said, and many times she inquired if Father Willand thought that Bernard had escaped beyond all reach of pursuit. He replied that there was every reason to suppose so, as it was certain that at the end of four-and-twenty hours not a trace had been discovered of the road which he had taken.

What course she was now to pursue herself became the next subject of discourse. "We must wait here," she said, "for some days longer, in order to make sure that he is not discovered and brought back; but then, good father—then I would fain leave this place, where I may be subject to painful importunity."

"But whither would you go, lady?" demanded the priest. "There are few of the neighbouring sovereigns that would dare to receive and protect a fugitive of your rank and wealth. Even the Emperor and the King of Spain, though they would seem by their badge to claim kindred with the Argonauts, would think twice ere they received such a golden fleece from our fair land of France."

"I will put them to no such trial," replied Isabel. "Wherever I go, it shall be as one in humble station. I will cast from me all pretensions to that rank, the purple garments of which would be sad trammels on the limbs of a fugitive. Wealth I shall have none to display; and though the sums which the King has caused to be paid me, as heiress to my father and poor Henry, may afford me all that I can wish or need, I must husband it well even to do that. No, no—I will seek the cottage rather than the castle, good father. Palaces have brought me woe enough: and, in humble garb and lowly station, I shall find shelter and disguise which will not easily be penetrated. In the meantime, we must wait here, good father, till we hear more from Paris."

"Faith, lady," replied the priest, "you may wait, if it so pleases you, but I must go on; for the King's anger at all this business is desperately aroused, and a ship which is sailing before that hurricane cannot well lay-to. His majesty has sent me full speed to my poor cure; and I must be onward on my way before nightfall."

Isabel looked down, grieved and perplexed; for she felt more than ever the need of some one on whose friendly aid and counsel she could rely, who would advise her in difficulties, aid her in danger, and support her under care and sorrow. While the fate of Bernard de Rohan had seemed decided; while she could look to no other prospect

but the desolate solitude of a disappointed heart; while it wanted but the brief agony of the last fatal blow to sever her from worldly things for ever—absorbed in her anguish for him—she had thought little of her own future fate and situation. The idea of a convent, however, had been always present to her mind, as her only place of refuge upon earth. She had laid out no plans upon the subject; she had given it no reflection; but it appeared as a thing decided, a something that was to be.

Now, however, the image of those grey walls and silent cloisters, which she had looked upon as the only shelter where she could consume the melancholy hours of after-life, had passed away. The hope of uniting her fate to that of him she loved revived, and she determined, as we have seen, to fly from those scenes where absolute power might at any time wring from her the hope which had so lately sprung up again. But the question, of what was to be the next step, of the how, and the whither, and the when she was to fly, was pressed upon her imperatively by the good priest's last words.

If the wrath of the King, she thought, were so much excited, might it not speedily show itself towards her? Might he not foresee what she would do, and take means to insure that she should not execute the plan that seemed to her the only one which true and devoted affection could follow?

Thus it is with us all: impressed deeply with our own purposes, wishes, and feelings, we believe that other people must have a glass within their bosom to reflect them all at once, not knowing that the sensations of every individual throughout the wide world are as variously modified as their features; that it is as difficult to find two hearts that feel, two minds that think exactly alike, as to find two faces that could not be distinguished from each other, or two bodies exactly similar; and that in expecting or fearing that others should divine our impulses by their own, we calculate upon a thing which seldom if ever occurs. Our purposes may be discovered by a knowledge of our general habits of thought and action; but it rarely happens that the man is right who judges of another's motives by his own.

"The King," she thought, "will immediately see and understand that affection will induce me to dedicate my whole life to soothe and comfort him I love, in adversity and exile, and his anger will lead him to take instant means to prevent me from so acting."

Although it is true that the King's anger did produce, in

some degree, the effect that she imagined, his conduct proceeded from none of the motives she supposed. He never dreamt that she would think of so bold and daring a thing as to fly from his court, and remove herself from his power. Such an action at that time might be considered as little less than high treason, and the likelihood thereof never entered into Henry's mind.

On such considerations, however, Isabel now acted; and after a few minutes' thought, she said, "Well, good father, since it is so, I must fly from the King's wrath also, and I will fly at once, lest I be stopped altogether. By so acting, there will be no harm done. I will not believe that poor Bernard can be recaptured. God is too just and merciful to suffer one so innocent to perish. Even if he were, however, it matters not much whether I take the veil in this or in another land; and even by flying at once, perhaps, I may mislead his pursuers into a belief that he has taken another course with me, from that which he has really followed. I will fly with you at once, then, good father, and you shall be my guide and my supporter."

"I would fain it should be so, my child," replied Father Willand; "but in seeking to go with me, you are like a young fawn who should ask a hunted stag to take her under his protection when frightened by the cry of the hounds. They can trace me at every step, daughter, and doubtless have traced me on my way already. Thank God, there is more than one highway in France, and people that take two opposite roads may meet in the end. I have a plan for you —I have a plan for you. But we must be quick and active; and whatever we do now, we will do with a good heart, since hope gives us her light to lead us on."

Father Willand remained with the lady till after the morning meal; but then his mule was brought round, and he took his departure with a blessing on the house. A servant went with him down the avenue to open the gates for him; but to him good Father Willand said little or nothing, though he had talked for some time apart with an elder attendant, who had first given him entrance. All then resumed its quiet in the château. Few of the inhabitants were seen moving about. The lady continued in her chamber with a young girl, who had become her immediate personal attendant, since, on arriving at the court of France, she formally dismissed for ever the woman Marguerite, who had so basely betrayed her. About five o'clock in the evening, however, at the great gates of the park appeared an officer of the King, with three or

four attendants and a horse litter—a long awkward contrivance borne between two horses, then much in use, although very liable to accidents. Having announced that he came from the King, he was of course admitted immediately, and rode through the park to the château.

"Inform your mistress," he said, to the servant whom he found in the hall, "that I have the King's commands to escort her immediately to Paris, and at the same time to search this château and the adjacent grounds, in order to ascertain that a prisoner, just escaped from justice, is not here concealed."

The servant replied that he would instantly inform the lady; and, while he retired to do so, the officer ordered some of his followers to examine strictly every part of the park. They proceeded at once to obey his commands; but he himwas kept waiting in the hall for a considerable time. He heard doors open and voices calling, and one domestic asking another where their mistress was. At length it was announced to him that she could not be found; and some declared that she must have gone out to walk again in the grove above, while others vowed that she had never quitted the house.

All soon became confusion, investigation, and doubt. The lady and two of her household were absent, and from the removal of jewels, money, and clothing, it was clear that no intention of speedy return was entertained. Every part of the château was searched, every part of the park, but nothing could be discovered. Every servant was examined, every peasant in the neighbourhood, but no information of any kind could be obtained: and it was universally asserted, that upon none of the three roads which led from the château had any one been seen but peasants, with the single exception of the priest, whose path could be traced back distinctly to Fontainbleau.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

In a small dark room, situated at the end of a long passage up four flights of stairs, with the windows closed in order that the light from a lamp on the table might not find its way forth into the streets without, sat four men, whose habiliments did not certainly agree very well with the scenes in which they were found. All were dressed well; two of them splendidly; and one, though more simple in his garments than the others, though small—perhaps even dimi-

nutive—in person, and remarkably beautiful in features, had with him an air of power, determination, and command, which marked him out as a man accustomed to the exercise of high authority, and conscious of possessing great influence of some kind.

Though such was the personal appearance of the party I have mentioned, the chamber in which they sat presented nothing but bare walls, clumsy settles of wood, an oaken table bearing a brass lamp, a brazen sconce against the wall, and a huge chimney of painted wood, jaundiced by the smoke of many a century.

Darkness had covered the earth many an hour, and the whole party sat there for several minutes without uttering a word, the smaller person we have mentioned remaining apparently immovable at the head of the table, with his fine head resting upon a hand which was somewhat disproportioned to the size of his body, being large and muscular, and fixing his eyes with an expression of some eagerness and anxiety upon the door which led into the passage.

After this silence had continued for a considerable time, however, he raised his head, saying, "Snuff that candle in the sconce, Jarnac—I fear he has failed in his attempt."

"We should all be in a rare scrape," replied the other, who rose to do as he was told—"we should all be in a rare scrape, if he should be caught and put to the torture."

"Did you ever kill a wolf, Jarnac?" demanded the one who had first spoken.

"Many a one, my lord," replied the other. "But what of that?"

"Why, if you have," replied his companion, "you have never heard him howl in his death. Now you would as soon make a wolf howl or a cat be silent, when you are killing it, as you would make our good friend the Chevalier say one word by all the tortures in the world. I know my man, and how entirely he can be trusted."

"I do wonder, I confess, Maréchal," said one of the other gentlemen at the table, "that you make use of such people in any way. In this instance, indeed, his services may be very appropriate; but in the field the matter is different. What would the King say, if he knew it?"

"He does know it," replied the other; "and he says what I will make you say some day, my good friend, when you see what these fellows can and will do in cases where their courage is put to the test. As to the man we have to deal with now, I can tell you, that with all the honourable service

of such gentlemen as you are—with all your skill, and courage, and ability—I should not have been able to maintain Piedmont two months if it had not been for his assistance and for his intelligence."

"Why, what could Philip have done?" demanded the gentleman who had risen.

"He would have given me a *coup de Jarnac*,"* answered the one at the head of the table, which reply caused a smile to come upon the countenance of the rest. "But hark," he continued, "I hear some one in the passage. Let us be upon our guard."

Scarcely had he uttered the last words, when a quick and eager hand was laid upon the lock, the door burst open, and a man clothed with the black robe and cap of an exempt rushed in suddenly. One of the gentlemen laid his hand upon his sword; but the intruder paused ere he reached the table, and looked round as one bewildered upon the faces there collected, while he who sat at the head of the table rose and embraced him warmly, exclaiming, "Welcome, my poor friend! welcome! Close the door, Jarnac, and lock it. Are you pursued, De Rohan? If you are, we have another place of security for you, behind the panel there. Are you pursued?"

"I believe not," replied Bernard de Rohan. "I think not. He who delivered me remains below to see; but I do not think, Brissac, that any one saw how the matter was accomplished. On my life, it has all been so sudden that I myself scarcely know the facts; and to see you here, too, almost makes me fancy myself in a dream. How did it take place? Was the gaoler bribed?"

"Nay," replied Brissac, "we know as little as you do: indeed, still less. All we can tell is, that our good friend the Chevalier Lenoir—finding I had arrived in Paris secretly, in order to disabuse the King's ear of the tales told him, against Montmorency, by the Guises, and to obtain farther assistance

* This alluded to the famous duel, which had taken place some years before in the presence of the whole French court, between Jarnac and La Chataigneraie, when the former, who was then quite an unknown young man, or only celebrated for his courteous manners and foppery, overcame his adversary, who was renowned for his fierce courage and skill in arms, by a back stroke, which divided the tendon of his leg. The latter ultimately died; and the superb supper which he had prepared in his tent to regale the lords of the court whom he had invited, with that ridiculous bravado, to revel with him after he should have killed Jarnac, was plundered in the most scandalous manner by the lackeys of the court. The expression of a *coup de Jarnac*, to express an unexpected blow, passed into a proverb from this event.

for myself in Savoy*—came to seek me, and undertook to set you free from prison if I would undertake to get you safely out of Paris."

"And so you did not believe me guilty, Brissac?" exclaimed Bernard de Rohan, grasping his hand.

"How could I, my young friend?" replied Brissac. "How could any one who knows you as I know you? First, I do not think that any provocation would have tempted you to draw your sword on Henry of Brienne. Next, if you had done so in honourable strife, you never would have denied it; and as to doing any such thing other than honourably, no one who has served with you could dream of such a thing for a moment. But tell us how the Chevalier managed to free you. We were in no degree made acquainted with his plans, and are as curious as washerwomen to know how the thing was brought about."

"I will tell you all that I know," replied the young gentleman, "though that is but very little. When they took me to the great Châtelet where judgment was to be pronounced, I observed few, if any, persons near the entrance; but when the sentence had been read, and I had spoken what I judged right, I thought I heard, as we left the hall, a voice near me say in a low tone, 'Take courage.' I heeded it little, however; but when I passed out of the building, to be led back to the petit Châtelet, I saw a great number of people round the gates, who followed us, and seemed to pity me, pressing hard upon the archers with murmurs and some shouts. The small number of men with me, the words that I had heard—which made me think that one of the two ushers was my friend—and the demeanour of the crowd, made me entertain some hopes of escape, when suddenly, as we were crossing the bridge, a fresh body of archers came up, together with an exempt and an usher, surrounding me so closely that all hope vanished. The doors of the lesser Châtelet were soon closed behind me; the gaoler, who is called Bertrand Saar, sent his keys by one of the under-keepers of the prison, turning away his head, and not saying a word himself. With an usher on one side, an exempt on the other, and several persons following, I was hurried along through the dark corridors. As we went, some loud conversation was begun by the men behind regarding the mob, and the necessity

* This private expedition of Brissac to Paris, for the purposes here stated, would seem to be beyond doubt; and illustrative of his great powers of sustaining fatigue, there exists a tradition that he never slept in a bed from the time he left his head-quarters till he reached the French capital.

of making haste away, lest it should increase to a dangerous extent, and stone the guards, as had been done once before. At that moment I felt the exempt draw me nearer to him by the arm, and heard him whisper, 'Yield yourself to me in all things. Be quick and dexterous in putting on what I give you, and then follow like lightning, when I say the word.' By this time we were at the dungeon door. The gaoler unlocked and drew it back, standing behind it with his lantern, as it filled up a considerable portion of the passage. The archers and the rest of those who had been following, were kept back a step or two by what seemed to me one of their officers, who stood in the middle of the passage talking to them eagerly. The usher, the exempt, and another officer of the archers came in with me into the dungeon; and while one snatched up the lamp and snuffing it against the wall, threw the whole place for a minute into darkness, the other cast this black gown over my shoulders, and put the cap upon my head. Before I was well aware what was doing, the usher pushed me out before him, saying, 'Come, let us be gone, and leave the prisoner to repose.' The officer set down the candle on the table with his back to the bed, saying, 'Good night, Monsieur de Rohan—I wish I could help you;' and then followed the rest, turning the key with his own hands, and giving it afterwards to the gaoler. In the meanwhile, the other two hurried me on, no one perceiving in the darkness and confusion that there was an exempt more than the number. The man who was by my side pushed me forward, whispering only, 'Be silent as the grave.' In passing out through the gaoler's room, several were turning towards us, as if to speak, and one of them asked some of the archers to drink wine; but an officer at that moment created a little confusion and jesting at the other side, by pulling the beard of Bertrand Saar, who sat half asleep over the fire. In the meantime, we hastened on, and were soon past the gates. The crowd was thinner than before; but a number of persons were still there, who saluted us with hootings and stones. The order was then given for the archers to disperse and follow them; and I felt myself pulled onward by the sleeve, up one of the streets leading hither. An officer of the archers was beside me, and I dared not say a word to my friend, the exempt, on the other side, for fear of betraying myself. This continued for some way, there being a group of persons running on before, and every now and then turning to throw a stone or two, which took no effect. Some other archers, who were coming

on, soon gave up the pursuit; and what was my surprise then to see two of the mob that we had been following, suddenly cease their flight and advance to meet us, saying, 'All is right!—the rest are gone!' The exempt then looked round, and said aloud, 'Disperse, then, and leave him with me—I will meet you all ere daybreak to-morrow.' I then, for the first time, recognised one to whom I have owed my liberty before."

"In other words," said the Maréchal de Brissac, "our good friend, the Chevalier Lenoir; or, to call him by his more formidable name, Corse de Leon. But I hope and trust that he has got into no trouble himself, for this has been a bold attempt. Where did you leave him, De Rohan?"

"At the door of the house, my lord," replied the young cavalier. "He said he would stay to see that we were not pursued, and gave me some directions for finding this room, which I wonder that I understood, for, to say sooth, my brain was, and still is, so confused and perplexed, that I scarcely even now believe that all these things are real."

"Run down, Jarnac," said the Maréchal—"run down, and see that no harm befals our good friend.—Ay, De Rohan," he continued, "your brain may well turn round; for though I have seen you front Death many a day as carelessly as if he were but your adversary at a party in the Mall, yet he bears another aspect when we sit and look upon him calmly and deliberately, without the power to struggle against him or turn away our eyes."

"Alas! my dear lord," replied De Rohan, "that was not all. Were I to choose, I certainly would meet the great foe of human life in the battle-field, or before the walled city, coming on the cannon ball or on the lance's point; but still I do believe that I could meet him calmly and firmly also on the bed of sickness, or in any other way but in the shape of a dark, dishonourable end, the sport of grinning multitudes, fallen, and given up to disgrace, and charged with crimes my very heart abhors. It was all this that made death terrible; and now, by the sudden change of all my feelings, by this confusion of brain and perturbation of mind, I know for the first time fully how terribly apprehension and despair had cast me down."

"Well, well, repose for a moment," said Brissac, "and we will pledge you in a cup of wine, for here am I lodged, with all conveniences to boot; and in the little room hid behind the wainscot there, we have both bottles and glasses,

and all the refreshing aids of life. The King has sent me some choice vintages from his own cellar; for he would not have it known for half of Italy that I am in his good town of Paris; and I must needs go back before two days are over, to settle what remains unsettled in Savoy. Bring us out cups and bottles, Martigny. We must refresh our prisoner before we send him off again.—Do you know, De Rohan, that you will have to ride far to-night?"

"My lord, I am quite willing," replied the young cavalier. "I cannot but feel that every moment I remain here, I peril your safety as well as my own."

"Psha!" said Brissac. "Not so, De Rohan: I am too old a soldier not to lay my plans well beforehand, and to guard against all surprise. Here is a passport for two of my followers, Monsieur de Martigny, there present, and a gentleman of the name of Marli. They are very accurately described. See if you would know your own picture. It was easily obtained from the King, who is so anxious to prevent the Cardinal or his brother from knowing the fact of my being in Paris, that he himself enjoined me to get my followers, few as they are, out of the city by slow degrees and quiet means. There is an order already sent to the gates to give immediate exit to two gentlemen bearing this passport, and the horses will be here ere half an hour is over. Make the best of your way to our good friends the Swiss, and then by Geneva round to Savoy. By taking that road, you will not be recognised; and when we meet amongst the Alps, we will arrange some farther plan for your safety and your comfort. But here come Jarnac and the Chevalier. Welcome! welcome! Monsieur Lenoir. This is indeed a *coup de main* worthy of a Lautrec or a Bourbon. Is all quiet without?"

"All is quiet, my lord," replied Corse de Leon, who stood at the end of the table while he spoke, gazing with calm seriousness sometimes on Brissac, sometimes on Bernard de Rohan, and never suffering his lip to be moved into a smile.—"all is quite quiet, my lord, and will, I trust, remain so till to-morrow morning, when they must necessarily discover this gentleman's flight."

"It will be discovered ere that, I fear," replied Bernard de Rohan; "for good Father Willand left me not long ago, to bear back my reply to the King, promising to return to me speedily."

"That is unfortunate," replied Corse de Leon. "I met the good priest not long ago, and was about to make him acquainted with our plan, for he might have assisted us much.

He was in haste, however, and I told him to meet me in the arcade at the Cordeliers: but as I passed by the spot, he had not yet arrived; and hearing that the archers were marching down to take you to the great Châtelet for judgment, I knew that there was no time to be lost."

"From Monsieur de Rohan's account," said Brissac, "you must have had confederates amongst these archers."

"I had," answered Corse de Leon, drily, "and I had archers of my own besides. The only difficulty was to find an excuse for mingling with the others; but that was soon gained by throwing a few stones, and what between the connivance of some and the ignorance of others, the matter passed easily enough. There was many a one, doubtless, suspected something, but did not choose to speak at the time, and will take care to hold their tongues now, so that the matter may possibly never be known. That mad rebel, Janicot, indeed, had well nigh spoiled the whole affair. As Bertrand Saar sat by the fire resolved to see nothing of what was going on, the impudent villain pulled his beard, presenting to the eyes of the town gaoler the face of the most notorious swindler in Paris, joined to the body of an archer of the prévôt's lieutenant. However, this is a sad mishap that the good priest should go thither unprepared; and there is nothing for it, my lord, but that Monsieur de Rohan should go forth at once before the alarm is given, otherwise the gates will be shut. I will leave orders for my own people, and will go with him. My horse is ready saddled. We can find the other two at the stables."

"But I have got no pass for you, my good Chevalier," replied De Brissac. "The one I obtained only specifies two, and one of those must be Martigny. Come, fill up the cup, De Rohan, and drain it off. You will need strength, for there is nothing relaxes the strong sinew like grief."

"I always bear my own passport, my lord," replied Corse de Leon, to that part of Brissac's speech which was addressed to him. "They do not stop me at town gates in general."

"On my life," said Brissac, "you have come very near the King's majesty, most noble Chevalier. You furnish your own passports, and provide your own archers, open the doors of prisons, and cause the town gates to be unbarred at your pleasure. You surely must be the King himself."

"Not of France, nor of Paris," replied Corse de Leon, "for here we are all in bonds; but on the mountain-side, my lord, I am king—king of myself, which is the only kingdom

that I covet; and now, thank Heaven, I shall be there again right soon. A city always makes me feel sickly, not in body, but in mind. Let us away, however; let us away, for there is no time to spare."

"Yet a moment," said Brissac—"yet a moment. Come with me in here, De Rohan. You are not equipped as becomes Monsieur de Marli;" and leading his young friend through the small door in the panelling, which led into a little room beyond, he soon brought him forth again with his dress completely changed, his mustachio cut short, and various other alterations effected, for the purpose of transforming his appearance. Corse de Leon, however, seemed to consider such arrangements very unnecessary, and somewhat like a waste of precious moments; for during the whole time that they were proceeding, he stood at the end of the table, with his arms still folded upon his chest, and his eyes bent down, but speaking no word to any one, and indicating a consciousness of the scene around him only by slowly beating the floor with the heel of his boot, and once or twice raising his eye to the door in the panel.

Monsieur de Martigny, who seemed to know more of the Brigand than the other two gentlemen, marked the little signs of impatience that he displayed; and in order not to waste time, prepared himself hurriedly for departure, brought his hat from the other room, buckled on his sword, which lay upon one of the settles, filled his pockets with various things he thought might be needed on the journey, and was ready to set out when Brissac and his young friend returned. The moment they appeared, the Brigand seized Bernard de Rohan by the arm, saying, "Come! come! We shall have notice given of your escape at the gates. Come!" and without taking any farther leave of the Maréchal or his companions, he hurried the young cavalier through the passage and down the stairs. Brissac followed, with Monsieur de Martigny, till they reached the door, and there grasping De Rohan's hand, he bade God speed him, and saw him depart.

The three then walked on rapidly till they came into a small back street occupied principally by stables. Corse de Leon left them there for a moment, saying, he would find his horse and come to them; and knocking at one of the stable doors, Monsieur de Martigny led his companion into a long close building, where a boy, who seemed the only person up, hastened to put the bits into the mouths of two strong horses which stood ready saddled. They were brought forth in a minute, and Bernard and his companion

mounted; but before they were well seated in the saddle, the noise of a horse's feet coming quick was heard, and Corse de Leon rode up and led them on their way.

In a few minutes they arrived at the city gates, slackening their pace as they approached, for fear of exciting suspicion. All was quite tranquil, however; and an old man who was sleeping in the lower story of a tower which then formed one of the gates of Paris, was with difficulty wakened to give them egress. Monsieur de Martigny tendered the pass; but the man, without looking at it, rubbed his sleepy eyes, saying, "I know, I know! They sent up word an hour ago.—People going to join Monsieur de Brissac, are not you?"

"Exactly so," replied Martigny, with a smile; and the old man, unlocking and unbolting the heavy gates drew them slowly back, and suffered the party to issue out into the suburb.

They all continued silent till they had passed the last houses; but when they reached a spot where the fields and vineyards began to appear around them, Corse de Leon paused for an instant upon a little rise from which the whole city of Paris could be seen gathered together, with the moon low down in the sky, lighting the sweet valley of the Seine, and casting the town into dark masses of deep shade.

"Now I can breathe!" he said—"now I can breathe! Oh cursed heap of stones! while I remain in your small dens of corruption and wickedness, I feel as if the very air I breathe were thick and loathsome with every abomination under the sun; as if the sky above me were loaded with groans, and tears, and curses, and lies; and as if the ground under my feet were ready to yawn, and swallow up the abode of cruelty, and deceit, and folly, in which I stand. I never enter your gates but a load like that of death seems to fall upon my heart. I never quit you but the wide world of God seems more beautiful, more sweet, more enchanting than before, from the contrast with this foul world of man's handiwork."

Having thus given vent to feelings which seemed to have been long gathering in his heart, he rode on with his two companions, and for the rest of their way during that night showed himself much more talkative than was common with him. His conversation was still of the same wild and enthusiastic tone as usual; and Monsieur de Martigny, who had a considerable share of the mere man of the world in his nature, either fell into fits of thought, scarcely attending to what he considered rambling nonsense, or merely listened to what Corse de Leon said, and smiled at his vehemence and enthusiasm.

Bernard de Rohan, on his part, however, joined in conversation with him from time to time, and at length induced him to speak calmly and connectedly on various subjects in regard to which he required information; for since he had been imprisoned he had been enabled to obtain no intelligence of Isabel de Brienne, or even of the movements of the court of France. When he heard where she was, the natural desire of seeing her and informing her of his safety immediately took possession of him, and he proposed, as they passed not far from Nogent, to visit the place of her temporary abode. Monsieur de Martigny strongly opposed his wishes in this respect; but Corse de Leon listened with a smile, and said, he did not see why it should not be undertaken. "There is nothing like danger," he added, "for a brave man."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

We must now pass over a brief space of time. It was in the spring of the year: though the bright season was still unconfirmed: the day had been as wayward as a spoilt child, now full of magical brightness and false promises of splendour, now drowned in stormy tears and overshadowed with lowering clouds. The morning had been warm and sunny, but the evening was cold and boisterous; and round the windows and doors of a tavern on the hill just above Lyons the wind roared and the storm pelted as if resolved to force an entrance.

In despite of the howling, however, warmth, and merriment, and loud laughter reigned within. In the wide black fireplace enormous logs of wood blazed and crackled as if it had been winter; and though there is every reason to believe that the fragrant and potential liquor called punch was then unknown in France, and ardent spirits seldom, if ever, to be met with, yet a more generous substitute was found in the red blood of the rich grape of the Rhone, which, mulled with sugar and spices, was flowing copiously amongst a party of men who, seated round the table, were employing various means of setting at defiance the tempest that raged without. One personage, who had arrived later than the rest, sat tearing to pieces an enormous capon; another was finishing his desert of dried fruits and savoury salt-meats from Italy; and the rest, who had imbibed a portion somewhat more than

sufficient, perhaps, of the warm beverage we have talked of, wrangled and laughed, and jested and railed, and shook the dice and shuffled the cards with all the fierce and reckless ribaldry which generally accompanies those diabolical inventions of the spirit of all evil. One of the men thus engaged was remarkably handsome, perhaps the word ought to be beautiful, in feature; strong and powerful, too, was he in form; but the expression of the countenance was as dark and sinister as it is possible to conceive.

Now, however, he had drunk much, was winning largely and loud laughter expanded his countenance; but riotous merriment was not able to banish the fierce and meaning glance of his eye, or to take away the bull-dog-like drawing down of the corners of his under-lip, when for a moment he paused to consider his game. Whenever a turn took place in favour of his adversary, he looked at him as if he could murder him; and on the other winning one solitary game out of many, the ruffian drew his dagger from the sheath, and struck the fine blade through the whole pack of cards, nailing them to the board at which he sat. Then, casting the dice into the fire, he vowed he would play no more, and sweeping up his winnings, took another deep draught of the hot wine.

"Well, Master Geronimo," said the man who was busy with the capon, "you have won enough for one night, I should think? You need not be in such a passion with the cards."

"I will be in a passion with anything!" cried the Italian, with a fierce and beastly oath. "Nothing shall cross me without feeling my passion."

"Except our good Lord of Masseran," replied the other. "Faith, he will cross you, and you must not cross him, Master Geronimo."

"Why say you that?—why say you that?" demanded the other, fiercely, and feeling for the hilt of his sword.

"Nay, nay, be quiet!" replied the other, in a calm tone. "We have but met here for one night, you going up to Paris, and we coming down from it, and we may as well spend it without brawling. How left you our good lord? How has he passed the long three months since he left us in Paris?"

"You said I dared not cross him," said Geronimo, still returning to the matter of offence: "why said you that?—If you said it out of your own head, I will cut your throat."

"It wont be the first you have cut," replied the other, coolly. "But you sha'n't cut mine; for if you show cold

iron, I'll have the host and the halberdiers in; but why I said you dared not cross him—if you will know—was because I saw him push you out of his presence, with an ill word, just before he and you and the rest of you left Paris to go home."

"He had better not push me again!" muttered Geronimo, between his teeth, with another horrible oath: "he has more need to fear me than I have to fear him. I could tell a tale of him, if I liked, that would set his head as high as Montfaucon, as you Frenchmen say. But no more of that! I may have to give him a sleeping dose some day.—Here, some more wine! Why, the fiend have the man! he thinks we are babies, and drink out of pap-spoons."

"But tell us, Geronimo," said the other, not unwilling to change the conversation, "how have you, and my lord, and the rest, passed the winter in Savoy?"

"Why, in building up the fortifications," he replied, "and listing new soldiers, and hunting wolves, and hanging five of Corse de Leon's band, whom we caught like partridges in a net, while they were helping the peasants to dig out old Gandelot's inn, which was buried in the last avalanche."

"I heard there were ten," replied the other. "You surely hanged ten, did you not?"

"Oh, yes, we hanged ten," replied the man; "for we hanged all that we found, to show ourselves impartial; but five of them were peasants."

"You had better not let Corse de Leon get hold of you," replied the other.

"I should like to get hold of him," answered Geronimo: "I would soon hang him to a gutter spout, and set him dangling from the battlements."

The other shook his head doubtfully, and looked round the room like a frightened villager after a ghost story. "Corse de Leon," said he, at length, "is not one to be so easily dealt with. I would rather, Master Geronimo, have laid down my right hand, and had it cut off, than have given him such cause for offence as you have given. He will not forget you, depend upon it."

"Let him remember me. He shall have cause!" replied Geronimo, with an air of bravado But, nevertheless, in spite of wine and all other things, it was evident his companion's evil auguries produced an effect upon him. He fell into fits of gloomy thought, talked of other things, told various stories of the sayings and doings of the Lord of Masseran since his return to Piedmont, boasted that his master could set the

Maréchal de Brissac at defiance, if he thought fit, and ever and anon applied himself again to the hot wine, till his eye acquired a vacant stare, and with a great effort he raised himself from his seat, made his way with an unsteady dart towards the door, and tumbled up the stairs of the inn to seek his place of repose.

After a heated and fiery night of feverish drunkenness, Geronimo woke early just in time to hear the noise of a horse's feet quitting the door of the inn. He started out of bed, believing that the sound might be occasioned by the departure of his companions of the night before leaving him to pursue his way toward Paris, and proceeding as rapidly as possible to Savoy. Such was not the case, however; and when he thrust his head out of the lattice, he could see nothing but a single horseman riding away, and taking the high road for Paris. Partly dressing himself in haste, he descended to the inn-yard, and caused one of the horse-boys to pour several buckets of water over his head and neck, which, although it scarcely penetrated the thick black curls of his hair, served greatly to diminish the feverish heat which the preceding night's debauch had left.

While thus employed, the other person with whom he had wrangled on the preceding evening, and who, as we have seen, was also a follower of the Lord of Masseran, approached him with a dark but meaning smile; and as soon as the horse-boy was gone, he said, "You missed a good opportunity last night, Geronimo."

"How so? how so?" demanded the Italian: "I won every game but one."

"I speak not of the cards," answered the other. "Listen! —I was up early this morning—before daylight; and about half an hour ago some one comes down the stairs with a quiet step. A horse was brought round; and I thought I might as well look out to see who it was. The man had got into the saddle; but I had a good look at his face, as he turned, in answer to the host's, 'God give you good day, sir;' and if ever there was a face like that of Corse de Leon, it was that of him who rode away. I saw him once," he continued, seeing that Geronimo became somewhat pale, and mused for a moment or two—"I saw him once, when I was in service with the Count de Meyrand—when we made the sham attack upon my good Lord of Masseran and the young lady, and were carrying them off.—You may recollect.—The real brigands came up, and delivered them from us false ones."

"Ay, I recollect," replied Geronimo; "for I remember, in

the first affray, I sent my sword through that young scoundrel who was making love to Mistress Marguerite, the Lady Isabel's maid. No one looked whether the wound came from behind or before; but it settled that business, which was enough for me."

"Ah!" said the other, returning pertinaciously to the subject, which he saw annoyed his companion, "I should not wonder if this fellow—this Corse de Leon—had heard all we were saying last night, and were to keep a watch for you, Master Geronimo. He has gone straight on, upon the road to Paris."

"Which road?" demanded Geronimo, assuming a look of unconcern. "I shall go after him."

"Oh," answered the other, "he can but go one road, I imagine. He will never take the road by Moulins. That is too public for him; and besides, the aubergiste tells me that he has taken the way to Neuville, just the same road that you are going yourself."

"Were you and I to follow him," said Geronimo, "and take him alive or dead? His head is worth a thousand crowns, at least."

"Oh, not I," answered the other; "I have no time for such an expedition. You know my lord wrote that we were to come down with all speed. But you can follow him alone, you know, Geronimo. You are just the man to cross swords with Corse de Leon."

"I shall not go out of my way to seek him," replied the bravo; "but if he should come in my way, that is another affair.

"Well," rejoined the other, "well. We will accompany you a league or so on the road, as soon as we have done breakfast. That will not be much out of our way."

Geronimo did not seem at all well assured whether this proposal was palatable to him or not; for there might be an idea lurking at his heart of changing his own proposed course, and taking the road by Moulins, instead of that on the Savoyard side of the Rhone. On second thoughts, however, it appeared to him that, in case of being waylaid by Corse de Leon, it would certainly be no uncomfortable thing to have a few good companions, and he trusted that he should be able to persuade them to go farther than they first intended. However that might be, it was remarkable how slow he was in despatching his breakfast, and how many little things he had to do after, which delayed him till the others became impatient.

At length, after more than an hour had been consumed in this manner, Geronimo and the other servants of the Lord of Masseran mounted their horses and rode on; but as soon as his malicious comrade had seen him fairly on the road to Neuville, so far that he could not retread his steps without acknowledging that he was afraid of the redoubted name of the Brigand, the others took their leave to a man, in spite of all entreaties, and left him to go upon his way alone.

Geronimo rode at a very slow pace, and examined carefully every object that preceded him on the way; but at length, notwithstanding his tardiness, he perceived on the road before him, at some short distance beyond Neuville, a horseman going still slower than himself. This personage was, at the moment, riding up one of the high hills which, in that part of the country, diversify the road; and though he was at such a distance that the Italian certainly could, by no means, see one limb or feature distinctly, imagination immediately supplied the outline of Corse de Leon.

Geronimo showed no haste to overtake him, and indeed determined to cross the Saone at the very first place where he could find an opportunity. It unfortunately happened, however, that at the top of the hill, just within sight, was a small cabaret; and at the moment that Geronimo reached a little stream which flowed through the bottom of the valley into the Saone, he saw the wayfarer before him pull up his horse, a boy run out and catch the rein, and the rider dismount and enter the house.

Geronimo checked his beast also, and asked himself what he should do next. At first he thought of riding on as hard as possible, passing the inn, and taking a boat at Trevoux, to cross the river; but then again a gallant determination suggested itself of going at once to the cabaret, denouncing Corse de Leon as a notorious brigand, and calling upon the host and his family for assistance in securing him.

Two or three considerations, however, prevented him from adopting this plan. In the first place, it was generally reported that Corse de Leon never travelled anywhere without having help at hand; and so sudden and wonderful had been the appearance of aiders and abetters on various occasions, that the more superstitious people of Savoy were inclined to believe that he had an infernal confederate, whose ubiquity is very generally apparent. In the next place, the Italian had to remember that the people on that side of the Saone had a goodly reputation for occasionally plundering the boats which came down the river, and therefore that Corse de Leon

might very possibly have a confederate in the host of the cabaret himself.

There was, however, one other course to be pursued, which Geronimo did not fail to adopt. By the side of the little stream that we have mentioned, a good bridle-road ran up into the country. Although well acquainted with the district, in consequence of its neighbourhood to Chambery, Geronimo was not quite sure of what town or city, village or hamlet, this might lead him to. It was easily calculated, however, that it could not take him far from Loyes or Chalamont; and one thing seemed still more certain, which was, that it would lead him out of the way of Corse de Leon. After pausing, then, for a moment, and looking with a well satisfied eye at a sweet row of trees, which, even in their somewhat naked state, concealed the road from the view of any one at a distance, he turned his horse's head to the right, and rode along much more at his ease after he had lost sight of the highway to Trevoux. He met with a few impediments, indeed; for that part of the country is encumbered with large tanks, pools, and little lakes, forming the heads of various small rivers running into the Rhone, the Saone, and the Ain. The country is somewhat desolate, too; and though, at that time, it was very well peopled, if we may use the term, with tall trees and thick bushes, yet human habitations were scanty, and the sight of man's face a blessing which was rarely vouchsafed to the traveller.

Geronimo, however, did not mind any of these things: certain marks and signs of a country that he knew began to appear, and a sensation of satisfaction at having left Corse de Leon far behind him, renewed his confidence in himself, and made him feel very certain that if they had met and come to blows, he would have had the advantage in the contest. He had even worked himself up into a feeling resembling regret because he had not gone on and risked his own life to gain the thousand crowns which Corse de Leon's head was supposed to be worth to any man who took it.

The sun was upon the eve of setting when he reached one of those large clear pools that we have mentioned. It lies not very far from the small hamlet of Chalamont and the village of Marlieux, and about a mile from the spot where one of the ways from Trevoux to Bourg joins the road from Mont Luel to the latter place. A large screen of fine trees lay to the westward of this little lake; and the setting sun, casting a lengthened shadow on the glassy bosom of the water, left two-thirds of the whole expanse in profound darkness,

while the rest was glowing with every magnificent colour which gilds a southern sky in the last half-hour of day.

There was a stillness, and a grandeur, and a solitude about the scene which was fine and solemn. Not a living creature was to be seen, except when a wild water-hen, startled by the sudden appearance of the Italian, raised herself a few inches above the bosom of the lake, and skimmed along into the darkness of the shadow, carrying away a long line of rippling light behind her, as her wings and feet stirred the water over which she flew. Neither was a trace of man's footsteps to be seen, nor a sound to be heard, but the wintry cry of the woodpecker as he flew along, seeming to laugh in his own undisturbed solitude.

Geronimo was not one to feel the beauty of the scene; but its solemnity he did feel; for such spots have a something which speaks to every heart, good or bad, light or heavy, of things beyond the mere existence of the day. They may waken memories; they may arouse thoughts of the future; but, in some shape, they impel to reflection—reflection, the great chastiser of the wicked.

There were many things in the bosom of the man who there rode along which shrunk from the scourge of thought; and he was in the act of applying spurs to the sides of his jaded horse, in order to escape from the impression of the scene, and reach a resting-place for the night, when suddenly, as if from the depth of the wood, a tall man on horseback came out into the road, and Corse de Leon himself stood before him.

The Italian recoiled as if he had seen a serpent; and, to say the truth, his heart sunk at the sight. It was not that he was a coward; for such was anything but the case. He was one remorseless of bloodshed; careless of human life; confident in his own powers; quick, ready, and fearless in danger. But there is almost always some one before whom the spirit fails, the heart sinks, who is feared without even reasonable cause, and before whom genius itself quails, as did that of Antony before Octavius. Such was the case with the man we speak of and Corse de Leon. Geronimo hated him, but feared him also; and the Brigand was, perhaps, the only man that the Italian did fear. To Geronimo the soothsayer might have spoken the exact words which the poet supposes he addressed to Antony:—

> "Thy spirit which keeps thee
> Is courageous, high, unmatchable,
> Where Cæsar's is not; but near him, thy angel
> Becomes a fear."

All thought of retreat, however, was now in vain. There was nothing for it but to fight. He never entertained a thought of Corse de Leon suffering him to pass unmolested. He never supposed for a moment, as many men might have thought, that the Brigand, whom he had never seen but once, and then only for an instant, would not recollect him.

Had he entertained such ideas, indeed, they would have been quickly dissipated; for Corse de Leon drew up his horse within a few yards of him, and gazing upon him with a calm and bitter smile, said, "I have been long looking for you! Get off your beast!"

"No, I will not," replied the Italian. "Why should I get off my horse?"

"Because," replied Corse de Leon, "you have given yourself a long round, and forced me to take a long round too, in order to meet you. You have had the worst road, however, and I have changed my horse since, so that yours is the most tired. Get off your horse, I say, and be quick. There is no need that any other brute should take part in the business we have to settle but yourself." And as he spoke he himself dismounted.

The man slowly did as he was commanded; but as he swung his leg out of the stirrup, Corse de Leon saw him put his hand for an instant into his bosom.

The next moment he crouched behind the beast he had been riding. There was a flash and a report, and the Brigand's horse fell prone beside him as the limbs suddenly lost all power. The shot, before it reached the beast, however, passed through the breast of Corse de Leon's doublet; and had the hand of the bravo been as steady as it usually was, the days of his adversary had most certainly come to an end at that moment; for, with his usual fearless boldness, the Brigand had sprung to the ground on the side next to his foe.

Fear, however, had done its work with Geronimo; his hand, which had seldom if ever been known to miss its mark, shook as he fired; but the moment that he beheld the horse of Corse de Leon fall, while the Brigand himself stood firm, he called down a dreadful curse upon his own head for his stupidity, and nerving his heart for the last terrible struggle, drew his sword and cast away the rein.

But the more fierce, from what had just occurred, Corse de Leon was upon him in a moment. Each had thrown aside his cloak, each was armed, as was customary in those days, with sword and dagger; and there were also two large pistols still undischarged at the bow of the Brigand's saddle.

"You shall have fair arms, mercenary butcher," he exclaimed, as he rushed upon his adversary like an eagle in the stoop. "You shall have fair arms, though you do not deserve them. Now, let us see how you dare face Corse de Leon."

Skilful as he was in all sorts of arms, making a trade of a sort of juggler-like dexterity, knowing every feint, and pass, and turn, and guard, which were customary amongst Italian swordsmen—the most famous at that time in Europe—powerful, young, active, and fighting for life, Geronimo was nevertheless no more a match for Corse de Leon than a fox is for a lion. He felt it himself in a moment. He felt that all he could do was to prolong the struggle, to grasp by every effort at a few moments more life, in the desperate hope of some accident, some fall, some slip, giving him the advantage.

The countenances of the two spoke at once the difference of their skill and powers. The Italian defended himself, and lunged at his adversary with teeth hard set, and fierce, eager, straining eyes. Corse de Leon drove him along the road, round and round the dead horse; sometimes against the bank, sometimes to the margin of the water, with a stern brow, indeed, and a quick and a glancing eye, but with a calm, contemptuous smile upon his lip, that seemed to show he held him in utter scorn.

Notwithstanding his superiority, however, although the point of his sword kept playing round the blade of his adversary, as if it were a matter of mere amusement, and every now and then quivered within an inch of his bosom, still he suffered Geronimo to escape the death which seemed imminent at each instant. The bravo felt that Corse de Leon was playing with him. It seemed like a sort of mental torture to which the other was subjecting him, to keep him long in the struggling agonies of death before he slew him. The torment became too great to bear; and he lunged more and more fiercely, almost anxious to bring the contest to an end any how; but at length a faint hope came over him. The Brigand might wish to subdue him, but to spare his life, and he exclaimed, in a somewhat humble tone, "You take not your full advantage, noble sir! What would you have?"

"I will tell you soon," replied Corse de Leon, and almost at the same moment the Italian received a severe wound in the shoulder, which deluged his arm and side with blood. "Now," exclaimed Corse de Leon, sternly, "tell me who it was that slew Henry of Brienne?"

"I know not," answered the man, doggedly, dropping his

sword's point, and retiring a step in order to keep upon his guard—"I know not!—Bernard de Rohan, I suppose."

"Do you think," said Corse de Leon, gazing sternly in his face—"do you think nature is herself so false, as to suffer you to utter such a base lie without writing the refutation upon your dogged brow? Your life is in my hands, and I again demand the truth of you. You cannot deceive me, for I know that you were alone with Henry of Brienne at the very time the murder must have taken place. I ask you, did you kill him? and if you did, will you bear witness against the man that set you on?"

"As I hope for salvation, and believe in the Holy Mother," replied the man, "*I* did not kill him."

"Then who did?" demanded the Brigand, fiercely. "You were the accomplice, if not the doer of the deed. Answer me, I say, for I will know."

"If I tell, will you spare my life?" demanded the man. "Will you spare my life, and let me go free?"

Corse de Leon rolled his eyes over him sternly and fiercely, leaning upon his sword, and seeming to be agitated by a strong struggle within himself. "I will not promise!" he replied, at length. "Butcher, I will not promise! You owe me much blood; but be you sure, at all events, that if you do not tell, you die within this half hour."

"Then have at you at once!" exclaimed the Italian; and springing across the intervening space, with one of those fierce bounds for which his nation were then famous, he endeavoured to strike his dagger into the heart of his adversary.

He knew not the man with whom he had to contend, however; and in an instant, before he could strike the blow, the right hand of Corse de Leon grasped his wrist with an iron pressure that nothing could resist, and the dagger which armed the Brigand's left passed through his adversary's shoulder, and made him writhe for a moment with intense pain. Corse de Leon cast him back upon the sand, and all consciousness seemed to leave the dark eyes of the Italian, who, after rolling for a moment in agony, gave a sharp shudder and became quite still.

The Brigand turned him over with his foot, looked at the wound, and put his hand upon his heart, murmuring, "I hope I have not killed him! If I have, we have lost the clue." He raised himself up again, however, the next moment with a smile, saying, "He is not dead! It is but the pain! He will soon be upon his feet again!" And unbuckling his belt,

he tied it tightly round the bravo's arms. He then uttered his own loud whistle, and in a few minutes two other horsemen stood beside him. Not many words were spoken; but ere a quarter of an hour more had passed, the spot where the strife had taken place had resumed its silent solitude, and no other evidence of the events just recorded remained, except a dark pool of blood here and there, and the dead horse of the Brigand, stripped of its trappings.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Were this work a romance, instead of a true history, it might be necessary to apologise for turning from more stirring scenes to speak of some of the dry details of policy, the movements of armies, and the intrigues of courts. On such political themes, however, we shall pause as little as possible, inasmuch as, even in the truest history, they are of very little importance when compared with the movements of the heart of man, the efforts of his mind, or the progress of his understanding.

During the autumn of 1558, and in the winter and spring of 1559, the difficult negotiations still continued which terminated in the pacification of Europe by the peace of Cateau Cambresis. But in the meantime, while great efforts were made in the cabinet by each party to gain the utmost on its own side, the same took place in the field, and the immortal name of Guise acquired additional glory by defending the northern frontier of France, by driving back the enemies of his country beyond her old established boundaries, and by interposing the shield of his valour and his skill between the throne of his sovereign and a successful enemy.

The troops, however, which were required to enable him to effect such great things, left the conquests of France in Savoy and Piedmont, to all appearance, at the mercy of the foe. With scarcely a handful of men, the Maréchal de Brissac remained to struggle against the whole power of the house of Austria, against the policy of Philip and Ferdinand, the arts of a thousand Italian diplomatists, and the treachery of a multitude of petty princes, whose strength was in their falsehood.

But still the vigour, the skill, and the courage of Brissac supplied all deficiencies. He met the enemy at all points

where they were found in arms. He appeared suddenly in places where he was never expected; and with quick decision he cut through negotiations which were supposed to be the most secret. He could not, it is true, put an entire stop to the traffic in small sovereigns which was carried on by the houses of Austria and Savoy; but sometimes he stopped defection by force, sometimes by threats, sometimes by gratuities; and still his extraordinary energy, and the activity and daring of those about him, succeeded in maintaining the whole tract of country intrusted to him for defence against everything that could be done by the skilful adversaries to whom he was opposed.

In some instances, indeed, he even assumed the offensive, though with a defensive view, and seized upon towns and fortresses which might serve as outposts for the protection of Piedmont. Many of these surprises were carried on at night; and, whenever such was to be the case, the enterprise was conducted by volunteers, selected as short a time as possible before the execution of the project. On all these occasions, during the winter and spring of 1559, the detachment destined for the assault began its march without any apparent commander. The first time such an event happened, some doubts and hesitations spread amongst the men; and the officers themselves inquired who was leading them. The answer made was an exhortation to be satisfied, for that a commander would not be wanting at the moment of need. Some whispered that Brissac himself had gone on before; some that he was following quickly after; but when the attack was really to commence, a leader taller and more powerful than the Maréchal appeared amongst them, with words inspiring all that heard him with zeal and determination, and leading them with a degree of skill, presence of mind, and daring, that crushed resistance and commanded success.

His pertinacious resolution, his fiery courage, was the theme of every lip. Where the spears crossed, and the swords waved the thickest, at the very muzzle of the flashing arquebuse, and in the blaze of the cannon, there was his form seen, with often none but enemies around him. When the victory was won, when the place was gained, when the power of France was firmly established therein, the leader disappeared, and was no more seen till the fierce strife was roused again in another quarter, and the same deeds were once more to be done.

Covered with the armour which was then universally worn,

his features were never seen: some vowed that they recognised his voice, some recollected having beheld such feats performed in other fields, but no one refused to follow him, none hesitated to obey his commands. The soldiery themselves seemed to regard him as the fierce angel of war, leading them on to certain success; and the nobles looked at the gilded spurs buckled over the boots, and, satisfied of his station, required no further assurance.

In the meantime, except when called forth to face, with his sudden energy, some more extraordinary danger, Brissac remained generally at his head-quarters, and there, turning his eyes from point to point, he met and frustrated the wiles of the thousand adversaries by whom he was surrounded. About the period of the spring to which we have led the reader in our last chapter, his attention was called to some proceedings which were taking place in Savoy, and especially to the conduct of the Lord of Masseran. That nobleman had strengthened the fortifications of his castle in the neighbourhood of Chambery; and he had also added several new works to another place, of perhaps still greater importance, which communicated with the former one by a long valley, leading towards the Milanese. Towers were erected at various intervals; barriers and bridge-heads were strongly fortified along the course of the stream; and to whatever purpose the wily Italian might intend to turn his advantage, it was evident that he was labouring to obtain means of commanding the communication between the dominions of Spain and those territories occupied by France in Savoy.

It must be recollected that he was in the rear of Brissac himself; and although he gave the most positive assurances that all he was doing was for the service of France, the Maréchal repeated more than once the strictest injunctions to desist. Those injunctions, however, had hitherto proved vain, the fortifications still continued; and although the farther progress of the negotiations for the peace were by this time so far advanced that little or no doubt could be entertained of its being fully concluded before many months were over, yet it became evident that Savoy was endeavouring to assume an attitude of menace, to render the treaty more favourable to herself, and that the crown of Spain was very willing to push her advantages, while plenipotentiaries spent their time at both courts in diplomatic technicalities.

There were more unequivocal, though minor, signs also, of a determination on the part of the Lord of Masseran, if not absolutely to abandon the cause of France, so far to

betray the interests of that power as to make up for his former treachery to his own sovereign, now that the Duke was likely to be restored to his rights.

The same constant communication by couriers which had attracted the attention of Brissac in the preceding year now again took place between the castle of Masseran and the Milanese. The servants of the Marquis were recalled from Paris; and every object of value, which either belonged to himself, or to which he could lay any claim as the husband of the Countess of Brienne, was brought, at different times and by various manners, into Savoy.

More than once Brissac wrote to the King of France, informing him that such was the case, and asking his permission to treat the Marquis as an open enemy; but Henry, with the prospect of a speedy pacification before his eyes, had grown somewhat supine, and he treated the proposal coldly, saying, that "it was needless to make enemies where they did not exist."

Brissac, however, soon after gained some farther information, which made him determine to cross the mountains and examine the conduct of the Lord of Masseran with his own eyes. The little inn kept by the aubergiste Gandelot had, as the reader is aware, been swept away by an avalanche not many weeks before; but with the pertinacity of mountaineers, the host and his wife, who had been rescued from their fallen dwelling, were even at this time busy in reconstructing an abode of the same kind, exactly on the spot where the old inn had stood. Some progress had been made in the work; and already a large wooden cottage had been framed, which afforded sufficient accommodation for chance guests at that early season of the year.

It was at the door of this dwelling that the Maréchal de Brissac stopped on his arrival from Piedmont, and here he was met by two French officers who had been a short time in that neighbourhood, and who now remained in conference with their commander for more than an hour. When their private interview was ended, Brissac, who, we find, was only accompanied by five or six gentlemen, sent to inform the Lord of Masseran of his arrival, and to require his presence at the inn.

That nobleman speedily appeared, followed by a large and powerful train; and Brissac, after receiving him with some coldness, informed him that when he had come thither, it was with a determination to inspect the line of fortresses which had been formed between that spot and the Milanese,

but that important intelligence, which he had just received, compelled him to return immediately to Turin.

"I shall, therefore, Monsieur de Masseran," he said, "confide the task to Monsieur de Thermes, whom you already know. He will be sent here immediately after my return, and as he will come accompanied by only twelve gentlemen, I shall feel myself bound to cause a part of my forces to advance to the neighbourhood of your lands on the other side of the mountains, so that the slightest wrong done to him or to his companions may be fully avenged a few hours after it takes place. You will, therefore, be good enough to suffer him to make that inspection which I judge necessary, and to give him safe conduct back to my head-quarters at Turin."

The Maréchal de Brissac was not a man to bandy words with, as the Lord of Masseran well knew, and therefore he merely bowed low and promised punctually to obey, feeling that such words need not in the slightest degree affect his after conduct. What passed in his breast during the interview, it would be hard to say, for Brissac was so scantily accompanied, that had the Lord of Masseran thought fit, or had he been prepared for a *coup de main*, there can be no doubt he might have effected it at that moment with ease, and perhaps with safety.

On many occasions, very daring men, and very wise ones, owe more to the fears and to the ignorance of their opponents than to their own courage or wisdom, and such was the case with Brissac in the present instance. The Marquis left him unmolested, and returned to his château, and Brissac recrossed the mountains, and arrived in safety at his head-quarters at Turin.

When the Lord of Masseran was once more within his own walls, he in some degree blamed himself for having suffered the Maréchal to escape. Nevertheless, on farther reflection, he argued that he had done right. "Had I," he said—"had I given way to the temptation, it might have put the whole of Piedmont at the disposal of Spain; but to do that before my bargain is made, would be to put myself at the disposal of Spain also. To the King of France it would have been a mortal and unforgiveable offence; and if Philip and the Duke are unprepared, or should not think fit to take advantage of the opportunity, I should be left to bear the blame and the punishment. Before this Monsieur de Thermes comes, however, all must and will be settled, and any movement of Brissac himself towards the other lands will give me a fair excuse for arresting his deputy and keep-

ing him a close prisoner till the matter is decided one way or the other. He shall make no reports! That I will take care of, and especially no reports about this new business. It is a hard game to play between these two countries. Were this girl's life out, or her vow pledged to the altar, it might be worth my while to attach myself to France; but while she lives, Savoy and Spain must be the lands.—Would that Meyrand were come!—I might then use his weak, vain eagerness to drive her into a cloister. His mad passion and his present fit of despair will lead him to anything.—What fools men are to love anything but themselves! The moment they do so, they put themselves in the power of others.—I wish Meyrand were come. The fool has become a mere instrument, and may be led to anything."

If it be asked whether the Lord of Masseran absolutely uttered such words, the reply must be, he did not, for he was, in general, a great deal too wise to give his counsel even to the emptiest room. But he undoubtedly so thought, and the words were spoken with his heart, if not with his tongue, confirmed as he was in the pride of his cunning by the overthrow of the unfortunate Bernard de Rohan, and firmly believing that his art could, and would, finally triumph over every one.

Cunning, however, almost always weaves around herself a net, which she fondly fancies is made for others, but in which she is at last entangled herself. One fine thread is brought across another, to guard against a danger in this place; a new mesh is provided to prevent the escape of the prey in that; and hour by hour, and moment by moment, the web becomes more intricate, the toils more difficult to escape from. All the time, however, she glories and takes a pleasure in the work, repairing like a spider the meshes where they break or fail, and fancying that they must succeed at length.

Very often, to the cunning man, the very delight which he feels in practising his art renders it as it were a necessity of his nature; and in almost all instances we find that the object to be attained (independent of that delight) is altogether incommensurate with the labour, and the care, and the thought. The Lord of Masseran, however, was working, and had been working, from the time that he had married the Countess of Brienne, for two great, and, to him, important objects—namely, to gain from France every part of the succession of the late count that avarice could grasp at, and art or daring reach, and to wring from the sovereigns of Spain and Savoy all that a double and treacherous policy could

obtain from the difficulties that surrounded them in their Italian dominions.

The only one who now stood between him and the possession of the whole estates in France, was Isabel de Brienne. There were three ways of removing the obstacle—death—a vow to the veil—or a marriage with the Count de Meyrand, who, in the eagerness of the passion that possessed him, would be willing, the Lord of Masseran well knew, to sacrifice everything as the price of obtaining her.

Her death was a thing very familiar to the thoughts of good Monsieur de Masseran; but, strange to say, notwithstanding the whole that the reader knows, and the rest that he suspects, he felt a repugnance to employ the means then very commonly used, to obtain his object.

In what complicated motives this repugnance originated would take too much time to investigate. Fear of failing might have some share—the difficulty of executing the deed in perfect secrecy—the dread of incurring such an amount of suspicion as would justify Spain and Savoy, while taking advantage of his services, to grant him no rewards themselves, and abstain from demanding of France, in the negotiations then proceeding, that compensation or equivalent for the whole lands of Brienne, which it was his great object to obtain—for, be it remembered, he never dreamt of rendering himself a French vassal, but merely strove, in the struggle of parties, to obtain the worth of the estates, rather than the estates themselves.

To the Count de Meyrand, then, turned the hopes of the Lord of Masseran; not that he believed that Isabel would ever give the Count her hand, but he thought that there was a fair probability of driving her, by persecution, into a cloister, and of leaving her no choice but either to wed Meyrand, after such a bargain was made as would secure her whole possessions to the Lord of Masseran, or to bury herself in a nunnery.

How this was to be effected, may be asked by those who know how skilfully her escape had been effected, and that the place of her retreat was still unknown to the whole court of France; but the Lord of Masseran had obtained a clue—or, at least, imagined that he had—to her present abode, and his purpose now was to make the discovery of that secret the price of his proposed arrangement with the Count de Meyrand.

Such subtle schemes as these occupied him during the whole of that day. Towards evening he received letters

from the governor of the Milanese, informing him that the position which Spain had been enabled to assume at the conferences, partly in consequence of his own manœuvres and the threatening attitude of things in Italy, had already had considerable effect. He smiled as he read the despatch, and sent off another in reply, telling the Spaniard that he had been visited by the Maréchal de Brissac, and throwing out a hint that it was high time some definite advantage should be promised him in case of his absolute declaration in favour of the Spanish cause.

The next morning, while pondering over all these matters, shortly after the morning meal, it was announced to him that the Count de Meyrand and thirty men-at-arms were below, at the gates of the castle, demanding admittance. At first, the number of retainers startled the good lord; and though, upon consideration of his own forces, any risk in admitting them disappeared, he still thought it prudent to beseech the Count to send off one half of his train to the castle of Robeck, some twenty miles further up the valley. Meyrand hesitated not a moment; and having given the necessary orders, entered the fortress with the rest.

There was not upon his countenance even any appearance of mortification or discontent; but grasping the hand of the Lord of Masseran eagerly, after looking round the room to see that no one was present, he exclaimed, "So, you have discovered her retreat!—You must have the eyes of a lynx. —Where is she to be found?"

"Nay," replied the Lord of Masseran, "I have not absolutely discovered it, and I shall have to give an immense reward to the person who is to reveal it to me."

The Count de Meyrand gazed upon him for a single instant with a scornful smile: "I understand you," he said. "Name the price. Be it what it will, you shall have it, though I am well nigh beggared already. But I must be sure, Masseran—I must now be made quite sure."

"You shall be quite sure," replied the Lord of Masseran; "for that which I demand is still only conditional upon your marriage with her.—I will come to the object at once. You shall sign me over her whole rights in the succession of Brienne. I will discharge whatever reward may be necessary, and call upon you for nothing.—The rest is your own affair."

Meyrand's cheek, which since we first saw him, had gradually changed its hue and become very pale, glowed somewhat redly for an instant; but he then replied, "Your demands are large, De Masseran. Give me the paper, how-

ever; I will sign it in an instant; for, as you say, the rest is my own affair, and I am no longer the fool that I have been. I cast from me now all scruples, all hesitation. I depend upon myself alone; and will suffer nothing now to stop me on my way. But still you must help me and give me aid, though it be but in a small degree. Place her within my grasp! Give me any strong place of refuge to which I can carry her sufficiently far from France, and from French dominion, to escape in case of need! Find me a priest that will read 'no' for 'yes;' and if she escape four-and-twenty hours without being my wife, take my sword and break it over your knee as a boy's lath."

"I will do all that you require," replied the Lord of Masseran. "Some of your men have already gone on to the château of Robeck. There you may set half the world at defiance, and escape, when you will, over the mountains to Milan. There is a priest, too, in the place, ready and willing to do whatever is required for a dozen crowns.—But still, bethink you, Count, will it not be better to have the King's consent, and let the whole thing go on smoothly?"

"No, no!" answered Meyrand, sharply: "I tell you, De Masseran, as soon as I received your letter, I informed the King that I was going forth to seek her, with hopes of success, and I asked his sanction to our immediate marriage. He rebuffed me coldly,—told me that, for the offence I had given in the past, he had vowed I should never have her hand—ordered me, if I found her, to give instant information to his nearest officer, and to return to his court immediately. My choice is made—my course is taken. Where is this paper? I will sign it at once."

"My good friend, it is not drawn yet," replied the Lord of Masseran. "I could not tell that you would consent. It will be soon drawn, however. But where is my man Geronimo? Has he not come back?"

"I know not," replied the Count de Meyrand. "I have never seen him."

"Why, did he not bear my letter?" demanded the Lord of Masseran.

"Not he," answered the Count de Meyrand. "It came by the King's common courier from Lyons."

The Lord of Masseran, at first, made no reply, but gazed sternly on the ground for an instant, and then muttered, "Some of his debaucheries! But come," he added, with a faint, unpleasant smile, "we will go visit my lady wife. You need some refreshment."

CHAPTER XL.

It was just a day and a half after the arrival of the Count de Meyrand, that the Lord of Masseran, on returning in haste from the castle of Robeck, heard that a messenger waited him, announcing the approach of Monsieur de Thermes. News had reached the ears of the crafty Savoyard during that day, which made a bitter smile come upon his countenance at this information, for, to say the truth, he had much doubted that the French officer would make his appearance. He had still more doubted that his train would be so small as it was reported to be, and he ordered a careful watch to be held from one of the towers, in order to ascertain that not more than fourteen or fifteen persons accompanied Monsieur de Thermes up the long valley which led from Gandelot's inn to the castle. Everything, however, was perfectly satisfactory. The numbers reported by the warder were not more than twelve; and when the French officer appeared in the hall where the Lord of Masseran waited to welcome him, he apologised for coming at all, saying, "Monsieur de Brissac, my lord, has received information since last you saw him, which might, perhaps, have spared me the necessity of making a visit of this kind at all; but as I was partly on my way, and had business to settle with the Count de Birague and Monsieur d'Acigné, I thought it better to come on and crave your hospitality for a single night."

The Lord of Masseran bowed low, and smiled sweetly, saying that he was delighted to see Monsieur de Thermes, and hoped that he would make a longer stay, as he was himself most anxious to show him the line of fortresses he had been constructing, and to prove how clearly they were destined for the service of France. "But let us come, my lord, to the banquet hall," he said. "Such poor entertainment as my table can give you is already prepared, and nothing is wanting but that you should enter the room, and let us wash before dinner."

"I will pray you, my Lord of Masseran," said Monsieur de Thermes, "before we sit down, to send one of your people to the little inn hard by, to tell Monsieur d'Acigné or Monsieur Birague, whichever may happen to arrive there first, to come hither and speak with me. My business with them will be soon ended, and your messenger may say that both need not come, unless they wish it."

Thus saying, he followed the Lord of Masseran towards the banquet hall, where silver basins and ewers were brought forward for the French general and his followers to wash their hands, as it was at that time customary to do in public on such occasions, and in a few minutes the two gentlemen were seated together at the social board. All was luxurious and choice, according to the notions of those times, and one or two dishes had succeeded each other, had been tasted by the various guests and passed away, when an attendant entered, and after speaking for a moment to the Lord of Masseran, approached Monsieur de Thermes, and said, "There are some peasants here, sir, from the valley of Saint Vial, who say that Monsieur de Brissac sent them word you would speak to them this day regarding the privilege of cutting wood upon the mountain side, which they claim."

"Tell them I am engaged," replied De Thermes, with a look of annoyance. "Bid them come to-morrow. Or stay, it is a long way—let them wait in the court, I will see them after dinner. You and I will see them together, Monsieur de Masseran, for this matter in some degree concerns you. Your lands extend in that quarter, and Monsieur de Brissac would not ratify the privilege required without consulting you; for inasmuch as he is careful that every one should do right by him, so is he anxious to do right by every one."

The Lord of Masseran grinned, saying, "He is a very famous and excellent person, Monsieur de Thermes. Bid the peasantry stay in the court."

"If my friend, Monsieur Birague, comes," said de Thermes, addressing the attendant before he quitted the hall, "I beseech you show him in. I will crave, Monsieur de Masseran, a cup of wine for him, and a crust of bread, for he has to ride far, you know."

"Most willingly—most willingly!" replied the Lord of Masseran, and the dinner went on for some time with great zeal and activity.

At length there was a noise heard as of men's feet approaching, and Monsieur de Thermes, looking towards the door, exclaimed with a gay air, "Here is Birague, doubtless —Ah! Birague and Acigné, too. Welcome—welcome, my good friends! But what a number of followers you bring with you: some of them had better not come farther than the door.—My Lord of Masseran," he continued, rising and speaking in a graver tone, "I grieve to say that the King, having received undeniable proofs that you have betrayed the trust reposed in you, and that you have agreed, in consider-

ation of a sum—It is of no use flying to the window, my lord; the castle is in possession of the troops of France—I was going to say, that as, in consideration of a sum of two hundred thousand florins of gold, and the whole tract of country lying between Aosta and Cordoniere, you have agreed to deliver into the hands of Spain the whole of your castles and forts on this side of the Alps, the King, by the mouth of Monsieur de Brissac, has commanded me to arrest your person, and to take possession of all your strong places. I have to request that you will give me up your sword."

The picture of despair and terror, the Marquis of Masseran gazed round him with wandering and straining eyes, with lips and cheeks livid with fear, and with his knees shaking under him. The French officers had risen at the same time as Monsieur de Thermes, forming a band of fourteen stout and determined men, all well armed and prepared for the business which brought them thither. At the great doors of the hall were Birague and Acigné, with such a number of followers as completely to block up the entrance; and in a part of the court which could be seen from the window, appeared the peasantry from the valley of Saint Vial, with drawn swords and pistol in hand, certainly much more like disguised men-at-arms than simple countrymen, mastering the Italian soldiery of the castle, and planting the banner of France upon the opposite walls.

"You see," exclaimed De Thermes, pointing to the scene before him, and then looking around upon the pale faces of the half-dozen Savoyard attendants that the hall contained—"you see, my lord, that all resistance is in vain. Give up your sword with a good grace. Birague, how many men have you in the castle with you?"

"One with another, General," he replied, "we have at least two hundred, and I think one half that number would do."

The Lord of Masseran unbuckled his sword, and with downcast eyes gave it to the French officer, saying, "I do not know what your orders are, sir, but I trust that the King will let me be heard before he affects my life."

"His majesty, sir," replied Monsieur de Thermes, with a smile at his terror—"his majesty does not pretend to judge you, or to affect your life at all. He does not forget that you are a sovereign prince, sir, and only requires that your castles and strong places should be given up to him, and your person put under restraint, in order to prevent your injuring him, contrary to your oath and special agreement, and endangering the peace of Europe, which is now happily likely to be

restored. The condition and manner of your imprisonment will greatly depend upon yourself, and upon your reply to what I have to demand of you. First, I have to require that you sign an order to all your officers, seneschals, and lieutenants, to give up possession of your fortresses and strong places to the King of France, at the very first summons and requisition, or to maintain the same at their own proper peril."

"I will sign it instantly!" exclaimed the Lord of Masseran—"I will sign it this moment!" and then beckoning one of his terrified attendants to him, he said aloud, "Fetch me paper and ink." But, as the man came near, he added, in a whisper, "Fly to the castle of Robeck with all speed, and tell what has happened.—They are in my cabinet," he continued—"there are pens in the drawer above the great oak chest."

The Italian had well chosen his time, for Monsieur de Thermes had turned away to speak with Acigné, and the officer on the other side was making a jesting observation to his next neighbour, on the facility with which their *coup de main* had been executed. No one marked the short whisper of the Lord of Masseran; and it was not perceived that the attendant who brought in materials for writing was not the same who had been ordered to bring them.

"Now, my good lord," said Monsieur de Thermes, "you will be pleased to sign a general order in the terms I have prescribed, for the surrender of all your fortresses and castles into the hands of the King of France, and I will beg you to make it as strong as you can in language, that the necessity of bloodshed and of the destruction of your own property may be avoided, and that peaceable possession may be taken by the troops of France ——"

"I can assure you, General," interrupted the Lord of Masseran, who was beginning in some degree to recover courage —"I can assure you most solemnly that my intentions——"

"Are fully displayed," said Monsieur de Thermes, interrupting him, "by the following letters, which, according to this schedule, are in the hands of Monsieur de Brissac. First, a letter to the governor of Milan, stating that you accept the proposal of his majesty the King of Spain, and are ready on Tuesday next, the fifteenth of the month, to deliver into his hands two of the fortresses stipulated, upon the payment of the first instalment, and the regular cession of the equivalent territories granted by the Duke of Savoy. Secondly, a letter to the Duke of Savoy, dated the twentieth of last month, and

despatched to him in the Low Countries, across the very kingdom of France itself."

"Geronimo has betrayed me," muttered the Lord of Masseran between his teeth—"I wish my dagger were within his heart."

"A letter," continued Monsieur de Thermes, "by which you assure the Duke that your adhesion to the court of France has only been compulsory; that you are now, as ever, his faithful vassal; and that if he will contrive to give frequent occupation to France on the northern frontier, you, by introducing the Spaniards into Savoy, will enable him to render the treaty of peace now negotiating infinitely advantageous to him. Thirdly——"

"There is no use of proceeding farther, sir," said the Marquis of Masseran, with an air of injured honesty. "By what you have just stated, it is evident to me that a very extensive forgery has been carried on against me for the purpose of revenge, if not under the incentive of a bribe. These letters can but have been written in my name by one person. I have long had about me a man of the name of Geronimo—Geronimo Porta,—a person uncommonly skilful in counterfeiting all sorts of hands, and who, having been often at my side while I have been writing, must have been well acquainted with mine. Having reason, about the middle of last month, to know that he had committed a very inhuman murder, I ordered him to be arrested, in order to execute him for the crime. He contrived, however, to make his escape; and the present charge against me is evidently the result of his malice. May I ask if he has fallen into the hands of Monsieur de Brissac? Should such be the case, I can prove that he deliberately murdered one of my wife's attendants out of jealousy, having had some cause to suppose that the man was a favoured lover of a woman named Marguerite, the waiting-maid of Mademoiselle de Brienne."

Monsieur de Thermes had heard him to the end with every appearance of attention, but he then replied, "You are mistaken, sir. This correspondence did not come into the hands of Monsieur de Brissac from the person you mentioned. They were delivered to him by a different individual. However, the best way of showing your real intentions will be to draw up the papers we mentioned immediately. I must now retire to make those necessary arrangements in the castle, which the change of circumstances may require, and I trust that at my return I shall find the authorization I have suggested fully drawn out and signed."

He spoke in a tone which admitted no answer; and then proceeded into the court-yard, and round all the works and defences of the castle, seeing that the soldiers of the Lord of Masseran were everywhere completely disarmed, and the castle in full possession of the French troops. As soon as this was done, he returned to the hall, and there found the paper drawn up in the terms he had dictated.

He examined it carefully and scrupulously; and then turning to the Lord of Masseran with that sort of politeness which is often more cutting than mere scorn, he said, "I grieve very much, Monsieur de Masseran, to be obliged to verify the old story of the hedgehog and the rabbit, and having come here as your guest to be compelled to drive you out of your own home. My orders are strict, however, to send you immediately over the frontier into France, where a convenient abode will assuredly be found for you by the King. A party of my men will escort you towards Latour in half-an-hour, and in the meantime, my friend Monsieur de Birague will attend upon you in the castle. I myself must ride on, as I intend to summon the castle of Robeck early to-morrow morning, it being now so late that I shall not arrive in time to do it this night."

Thus saying, with a formal bow, Monsieur de Thermes took his leave, while the Marquis of Masseran remained for half-an-hour a prisoner in his own castle, and was then conducted to France under a strong escort. No one was permitted to accompany him but his wife and one attendant, and the former left him soon after, nominally to plead his cause at the court of France, but in reality to place herself under the protection of the King, and to withdraw herself from a cold tyranny, which vanity had made her bear for a long time without resistance, but which had at length reached a pitch where it became utterly insupportable.*

CHAPTER XLI.

On the night which succeeded the events we have related in the last chapter, the Maréchal de Brissac sat alone in his cabinet, towards two o'clock in the morning. He was not,

* Not to take what does not belong to me without proper acknowledgment, I feel myself bound to state, that the whole of the last chapter is very little better than a free translation of the passage in the Life of Brissac, relating to the surprise of the Lord of Masseran and his castle.

however, so far off from the scene of events as the Lord of Masseran had supposed, having stopped at Montmeillan, in order to hear the result of the proceedings which he had arranged with Monsieur de Thermes. The principal part of his forces were on the other side of the Alps, but still in the strong town where he halted he had a large body of troops, and never losing a moment of his time, he was carrying on from it as many important operations as when he was in the heart of Piedmont itself.

He was now writing the last despatch of the day, after almost all his household and his principal officers had retired to rest, and he had nearly finished the task, when an attendant from the antechamber entered the room and told him that somebody without wished to see him in haste.

"Who is it?" demanded the Maréchal.

"It is the person you always see, my lord," replied the attendant.

"Then let him in at once," replied Brissac; and in another minute Corse de Leon stood before him.

"Now, my good friend," said Brissac; "what are your news? Something important, I am sure."

"Less important to you, perhaps," replied Corse de Leon, "than to many people; for though you do not altogether attend, as most men do, to the petty policies of a base world, still you must make policy your first consideration. However, it is of importance even to you, and still more to me and others."

"And you have every right to consideration," replied Brissac. "I have often told you that in gratitude for all the services you have rendered, I will willingly do anything for you that my personal means may afford, or that my uttermost interest and influence with the King of France can effect."

"I know your generosity," replied Corse de Leon, with a smile which had nothing of the bitter in it that generally mingled more or less with every expression of his countenance. "I recollect well the time when, to remove all difficulties from the projects of his king, the Maréchal de Brissac voluntarily offered to serve under a less experienced commander, losing all his authority and one half of his revenue; and I have seen him, to reward a common soldier, give the last ducat out of his own purse when the treasury of the army was exhausted. But such things are not the question now. The matter that I have in hand deserves some attention from you; and for reasons best known to myself, I call upon you to be present in person on the spot where an event of apparently minor importance is about to take place. De Thermes has suc-

ceeded in all things, as yet, and the Lord of Masseran is now a prisoner in France."

"For which we have principally to thank you," said Brissac.

But the Brigand went on without noticing the interruption. "De Thermes arrived within a league of Robeck last night. It was necessary, however, to leave half his men to guard what he had secured. He has not more than a hundred or a hundred and ten effective men with him. There are, at least, two hundred in the castle of Robeck, and they are apprised of what has taken place with regard to their lord."

"But they will surrender," said Brissac. "The hearts of such people have very thin blood in them in general; and they will see the folly of resisting."

"No, they will not," replied Corse de Leon. "They will see no such folly in it, with Spanish troops ready to pour in from the Milanese. Messengers have already gone to call for aid; and, besides, the castle is not defended by one of this petty traitor's own people."

"By whom, then?" demanded Brissac.

"By a rebel and a knave," replied Corse de Leon—"one of the bold-hearted villains of our own native land."

"Ha!" said Brissac, "who may that be?"

"None other," answered the Brigand, "but the sweet, fair, courtly, indifferent Count de Meyrand."

"Heaven and earth!" exclaimed Brissac, starting up, and adding, the moment after, "Even if he be there carrying on some of his base designs with the Lord of Masseran, he will never dare to resist the arms of France."

"You will see!" answered Corse de Leon—"you will see! He who has not scrupled to betray his friend, will not scruple to betray his king or his country either. He is too far plunged in, my lord, to have any hope in turning back again. Even now I know that he has set De Thermes at defiance, fired upon the officer who was sent to summon the place, and—not in his own name, it is true, but in the name of one of the Savoyard's men—has declared the authorization to give up the castle to France, which Masseran signed this day, null and of no effect, as the giver of it was in prison and under compulsion at the time."

"This must be seen to!" said Brissac, walking up and down the cabinet—"this must be seen to!" And it was remarkable that the act of rebellion on the part of a French nobleman, which the Brigand attributed to the Count de Meyrand, seemed to affect the Maréchal much more than any or all the many mortifications and disappointments which

he met with during the course of his command in Italy. "It is difficult to know how to manage this affair," he added. "I ordered three hundred men to march for Pignerol at daybreak, and they cannot well be spared. What number can you help us with, Chevalier?"

"Enough to take the castle by storm," replied Corse de Leon, boldly; "and I will lead them myself.—But you must be present, Maréchal."

"That I will, of course," answered Brissac. "Not in command—for I must not take it from De Thermes—but as a witness of the whole, and I will bring all the men with me that can be spared, to aid in your attempt."

"We shall need no great aid, I think," replied Corse de Leon; "I seldom fail. But still, I might be killed, and then a reserve were good. Yet I know not how it is, the balls seem to forget me, and cold iron to turn soft upon my flesh. I shall learn to think myself a magician some day, as the poor people of the country do. However, there is no time to be lost, if you are to bring men with you. Remember, 'tis a long march, and mischief may be done if the attack be delayed."

Brissac smiled. "I am not apt to make many delays, my good friend. I will give my orders at once; and an hour's sleep for myself is all that I require. Stay you here, and return with us. I know your people are always ready."

"They are," answered Corse de Leon; "but their leader must be ready too; and I will not leave that wily beast unwatched—no, not an hour, if I can help it!"

"Should I catch him in the fact," said Brissac, "he shall have no judgment but that over the drum-head, and as high a gallows as the castle of Robeck can afford."

"What! will you hang nobility?" demanded Corse de Leon, with a grim smile. "You will have a mutiny in the army if you disallow the noble his patent to commit wrong unchastised!—Fare you well, my lord; I will make your cook and your summeler to give me some refreshment; and you will find me ready when you appear."

One hour of rest was all that Brissac required; and followed by a detachment of about a hundred and fifty men, two small pieces of artillery, and two or three of the most experienced engineers in Montmeillan, he took his way to the castle of Robeck. It still wanted several hours of daybreak when he set out, and the march was long, cold, and dreary. Nevertheless, the Maréchal and his small troop threaded their way perseveringly through some of the most

difficult passes of the Alps, and about half-an-hour after the sun had risen, received the first intimation of their approach to the scene of contest by the roar of artillery at no very great distance.

In half-an-hour more they reached a high point of the road, which gave them a view into the valley where the small force of Monsieur de Thermes was drawn up. That officer had, with great skill, taken advantage of a little village, or rather hamlet, at the distance of about half a mile from the castle, adding some slight works during the night, and had brought up two pieces of cannon, which he had planted so as to defend the village against any sally made by the garrison, though the situation was not such as to enable them to play with effect upon the castle itself. It was not from these two small pieces, however, that the sounds proceeded which caught the ear of Brissac, but, on the contrary, from the guns of the castle itself, which had begun firing upon the village at day-break, thereby showing the determination of the garrison to resist the power of France to the utmost.

The Maréchal paused as soon as this scene presented itself to his eyes, and gazed upon it with a frowning brow. "Is it possible," he muttered to himself, "that a man, nurtured in honourable feelings as Meyrand has been, can so disgrace himself? What can he hope? What can be his object?"

As he thus thought and gazed, his keen and practised eye distinguished the gleam of arms part of the way up the opposite hill, which—as the valley extended considerably at that spot, and a small plain, with the river winding through it, was spread out between the castle and the mountains on the other side—might be at the distance of about two miles.

"Who can those be?" he said, speaking to one of the officers near him—"who can those be, lying under cover of that small wood of pines close by a large building—an abbey, apparently? Our good friend the Chevalier cannot have taken his men up there: he is too experienced not to know that it is from this side we must act against the castle."

"If the Chevalier does not," answered the officer who was with him, "Monsieur de Thermes must know better; and there is another also, monseigneur, with Monsieur de Thermes, who knows, perhaps, better than either of them—I mean ——"

"Hush, hush!" said Brissac, with a laugh. "If it be our unknown friend, who has stormed more castles in a month than any other man in Europe, we give him no name, you

know. Here comes somebody from De Thermes, however; let us go slowly down and make our dispositions. Do you not think, Monsieur de Janon, that there seems a defect in the wall there, to the eastward, where, if De Thermes has any ladders with him, the thing may be done by an escalade?"

The engineer declared his opinion that it was as the Maréchal said; but added, "We should need a troop of devils, indeed, my lord, to make the attempt."

"My brigands for ever!" replied Brissac, laughing. "You all wonder at my dealing with such men; you shall now see what they can do.* But go round by that path, and examine a little more closely, and then join me below."

Thus saying, he rode on to the small party which was coming up from the village, and at the head of which was Monsieur de Thermes himself.

"I have not come to interfere with your command, De Thermes," said the Maréchal, shaking him by the hand, "but merely to be a looker-on while you carry another of these castles. I have brought you some reinforcements. Gentlemen," he continued, turning to the officers of the troop, "you will be so good as to recollect the Maréchal de Brissac is not here, and the general commanding is Monsieur de Thermes."

"We must do all that can be done quickly, my lord," said De Thermes, speaking in a low voice to the Maréchal. "I have certain intelligence that the Spaniards are already on their march."

"We will send them back again, De Thermes—we will send them back again!" said Brissac, in a gay tone. "This country is too rough and cold for a Spaniard. But where are my friends the brigands? Surely Corse de Leon has not taken his people up to that wood under the hill?"

"He has some object in it," answered De Thermes; "for there they certainly are, and he at their head. Masseran's people set us at defiance here, and have even sent out large parties in various directions this morning, foraging all round, driving in cattle, and sweeping the hills of everything they could find. We were obliged to keep ourselves close to the village; but your friend the Chevalier, as you call him, scoffed at all precautions, and galloped off with his troop, though he had not above sixty men with him, and they have at least a hundred in one body."

"You will give him some support, I suppose, De Thermes?" said Brissac.

* I have given the exact words of Brissac, as recorded by his biographer, to account for the employment of a large body of brigands by a French marshal.

"Now that you have brought me a reinforcement, my lord, I will," replied De Thermes; "but it was impossible before, for these people kept us to our quarters. There are men of experience amongst them, evidently."

"I have heard the Count of Meyrand is there," said Brissac. "Do you think it is so?"

"I heard such a report last night," replied De Thermes; "but I did not choose to mention it, lest I should do wrong to the name of an honourable man."

A few words more of desultory conversation succeeded; and at the suggestion of Brissac, De Thermes ordered the two sakers, or small pieces of artillery which the Maréchal had brought with him, to be placed upon an elevated point near the spot at which they had now arrived, without descending farther into the valley. The castle, however, was so situated, that the fire of the cannon produced very little effect, and only served to draw the attention of the garrison from the village. It would seem that the besieged had not before this perceived the arrival of Brissac and the fresh troops; for in three or four minutes after the sakers were brought into operation, a small party of horsemen was seen riding rapidly down the hill on which the castle stood, and making their way toward the monastery or abbey which Brissac had remarked, and which, it must be remembered, was skirted by a deep wood of pines, that advanced somewhat farther into the plain toward the castle.

De Thermes, now anxious to distinguish himself under the eyes of Brissac, gave rapid orders for pursuing the party, and at the same time directed a small reinforcement to be sent to Corse de Leon. Before either of these orders could be executed, however, and while the Maréchal and the officers who accompanied him were riding down the hill with De Thermes, their attention was caught by a volume of thick smoke issuing from the abbey; and in a moment after, they thought they could perceive some flames, though at first they looked thin and pale in the broad daylight, issuing from the windows of the church.

"By Heaven, they have set fire to the building!" exclaimed Brissac. "Can any of you, gentlemen, tell what that place is?"

One of the officers who were behind rode up to reply, saying, "I heard last night, my lord, from some of the peasantry in the village, that it is an abbey of regular Cistercians, with a convent attached; but I cannot think that Monsieur de Meyrand would set fire to a religious building of that kind on purpose."

"On purpose or not," replied Brissac, "the place is on fire. But what makes you think, sir, that the Count de Meyrand is there?"

"Because I saw him, my lord," replied the officer. "They passed within three hundred yards of me this morning, when I was out reconnoitering. Some of them chased me back to the village, up to the very barriers, but not before I had seen Monsieur de Meyrand at the head of the troop. He was in a plain buff coat, without armour, but he was evidently in command."

"You had better double your reinforcement for Corse de Leon," said Brissac, in a whisper, to Monsieur de Thermes. "He has not enough with him to make the matter sure; and, depend upon it, he is lying in wait for the enemy as they return from the abbey. Had we more men to maintain our position here, I would venture a charge myself, to cut that fellow off from the castle."

Even while he spoke, a number of moving objects were seen around the abbey, the great bell of which could be heard tolling loudly, and in a minute or two after, a troop of horsemen appeared issuing forth from amongst the high walls, and taking their way back towards the castle.

De Thermes multiplied his orders in haste: horses were led out, and troopers mounted without delay; and a number of the gentlemen who had followed Brissac, besought and received permission to volunteer in the party destined to attack the adversary. But ere the little body thus collected could issue forth from the village, it was clear that the enemy's troop was perceived by the men who had been lying in wait under cover of the wood. A momentary blaze of fire ran along amongst the dark pines; the instant after, Corse de Leon and his band were out on the plain ground; and in two minutes more, advancing with a rapid and fiery charge, his men were mingled in undistinguishable strife with the opposite party.

CHAPTER XLII.

Happy would it often be for us if real life—which certainly passes away like a tale that is told—did permit, as in the telling of a tale, to go back in point of time and bring up all the scattered incidents, in whatsoever manner we like, to bear

upon and to affect the grand events of the whole. How many an omission would then be remedied! How many a vain thought would be swept away! How many a deed—small in itself, carelessly done, but terrible in its consequences—would be cancelled and blotted out for ever! There is none, however, but that great Being who writes with the pen of fate the history of man, who can efface one word; and his eternal justice requires that each forgiven offence shall be blotted out, even by the hand of mercy, with the tears of penitence and the blood of atonement.

We must go back for a while in the course of the narrative, but we will not go back far, however. Early on the evening of the same day which saw Monsieur de Thermes appear before the castle of Robeck, a lady upon a mule, with a priest walking by her side, a girl habited as a peasant, and one stout old male attendant on foot following, approached the gate of the abbey of St. Vial, which was even then grey with age, and cumbered with thick ivy. The party were immediately admitted into the abbot's parlour, where a very aged man dressed in the monastic habit received them kindly.

"I come for the purpose of claiming your promise, good father," said the priest, "to give shelter and protection to this lady. I told you that I would not do so except in case of the utmost need. That case has now happened. Her place of refuge has been discovered, and I have every reason to believe that those who persecute her are even now seeking her at her late abode, while we, following a different track, have, thank Heaven! arrived here in safety."

"Here you shall have peace, my children," replied the good old man, speaking in the Italian tongue, for French he loved not to speak, though he understood it. "Rash and wild as this Lord of Masseran is, and daring in his wickedness, as I believe him to be, he has never attempted, and will never attempt to disturb this abbey in possession of its rights and privileges. It were worth his coronet to do so. I trust to you, my good brother, however," he said, speaking to Father Willand, "that it is not from the King of France that this our daughter is flying."

"Not at all, in the present instance," answered Father Willand. "The lion, my good lord, seeks bigger beasts—he seldom preys upon the lamb. It is the wolf we fear—it is a certain Count of Meyrand, who—not only without the King of France's consent, but, as I am truly informed, contrary to his express commands—is persecuting this poor child."

"I beseech you, father," said Isabel, speaking to the old man in Italian, almost as easily as in her own tongue— "I beseech you, take me under your holy and secure protection. I shall not burden you long; for good Father Willand informs me that the King's troops are already in the castle of Masseran, and will doubtless soon put an end to the persecution which I fear."

"Ah! that is sweetly spoken!" said the old man, delighted to hear his own musical language from such beautiful lips,— "that is sweetly spoken, and you shall have full protection and comfort here. Not that I can keep you in the abbey," he added "even in the visitors' apartments, for I found it needful many years ago to make a strict reform in those things. But my sister of the convent hard by—who is my sister, not spiritually alone, but of the flesh, a child of the same father—will give you refuge there, always under my protection, but still in a separate building."

Isabel thanked him warmly; and the good abbot, perhaps, might have been well pleased to detain her a little longer, to hear her musical voice speak his native tongue, but with due regard to his character and habits, he led her away at once, and placed her under the care of persons of her own sex.

To find herself once more, as she believed, in security, was to Isabel's mind no light relief, and many pieces of news which she had heard as she came along the road, had tended to renew in her bosom feelings of hope, and visions of happiness, which had well nigh been once more extinguished under the long, dull passing of heavy and expectant hours. She was now treated with kindness and with gentleness; and after prayer and a light meal, she retired to one of the visitors' chambers, where, weary with thought and with journeying, she fell into a longer and deeper sleep than she had known for many a night. It was daylight when she woke again, and though she knew it not, the convent bell had rung long before for early prayer. Isabel hastened her toilet in order not to be too late, without remarking that the girl who busied herself in arranging her bright dark hair looked somewhat scared and pale, and plied her labours with an unsteady hand. Suddenly, in the midst, a dull heavy roar in the distance made Isabel start, and demand, "What is that?"

"It is the cannon of the castle, madam," said the girl. "They have been firing two or three times before, this morning."

"Then the King's troops are before the place," said Isabel, less frightened or surprised than the girl had expected.

"Oh! yes, madam!" she answered. "One of the lay sisters has heard that the Count de Meyrand will defend it to the last."

The sound of that name turned Isabel somewhat pale, for every idea associated with it was painful and distressing to her. She dressed herself calmly, however, without any observation, and was about to go forth from the small neat chamber which had been assigned to her, when one of the nuns came in with evident terror, saying, "Oh! my sister, do not cross the court on any account. There are armed men at the abbey-gate demanding you sternly, and I saw the head and shoulders of one looking over the wall this moment; but he could get no further, and the abbot is speaking boldly to them, and bidding them be gone. Here comes some one—here comes some one. Lock the door, I beseech you, lady." And she sprang forward to do with her own hands that which she counselled.

But Isabel stayed her gently, saying, "It is Father Willand's foot, madam; I know it well; for it has often brought me comfort and consolation during the last six months!"

Almost as she spoke, Father Willand appeared, entering without ceremony, but bearing an expression of anxiety and alarm upon his countenance, which accounted for any lack of respect. "Quick, girl," he said, speaking to the attendant, "gather whatever you can together in a moment!—Lady, come hither with me—throw on your veil, and come hither. The Count de Meyrand is at the great gates, threatening to force a way, and to burn the abbey if he be resisted. We may escape yet into the wood behind!"

"He will never do such a deed!" said Isabel, casting on her veil. "He is surely not wicked enough to do that!"

"He is wicked enough to do anything," replied the priest. "He is a desperate man now, lady. The check of all earthly fear has now been taken off him, by the want of all earthly hope; and it is then that one sees what a man's wickedness really will do. The good old abbot resists him boldly, but he has no power to resist long, and our only chance is in flight by one of the doors leading into the wood behind. We may then get into the rear of the royal forces and be safe."

As he still spoke, he hurried on, drawing Isabel after him; while the girl followed, caring little to take with her any other part of her mistress's apparel than that which she could

snatch up in haste. The good priest hastened across the court, passed through the cloisters on the other side, and opening the door by which he had entered from the abbey itself, drew Isabel with him into a quadrangle which had acquired the name of the Prior's Court. One side of it was formed by the abbey church, but before good Father Willand could reach that building, the Count de Meyrand stood before him.

The priest would have drawn back, but Meyrand, followed by half-a-dozen Italian and French soldiers, darted forward and seized Isabel by the wrist with a grasp of iron. Undaunted by the danger, however, Father Willand struck him boldly on the breast, exclaiming, "Stand back, traitor, and let us pass! How dare you violate this sacred place? —How dare you show yourself within the walls of this sanctuary?—The curse of God be upon you, false and bloodthirsty man!—Mark, all ye soldiers of France and Savoy, this man is a traitor to his king, and is by me excommunicated and anathematised for daring to profane holy ground, and break into the sanctuary of the church. All who aid him share his treason and incur his excommunication, and I vow——"

"You shall take no more vows upon you, priest," replied Meyrand, with a bitter sneer, still holding tight the wrist of Isabel. "Take him, my men, and hang him to one of those pinnacles.—Or, stay! I have more accounts than one to settle with him. Bind him hand and foot, and throw him over a horse. We have no time for long delays here."

"What would you with me, sir?" demanded Isabel. "I beg you would free my arm—there is no need of such violence."

"What would I with you, madam?" replied the Count de Meyrand,—"what would I with you? I will tell you, lady. I would do you the honour of uniting your fate and mine together for ever.—Madam, my hour is come. How long I may enjoy it, I know not; but while it is here, I will use it to the utmost. You are mine, now and for ever, and whatever fate awaits me, depend upon it, you shall share. Nay, struggle not, lady, this grasp upon your wrist is but the symbol of the grasp I have upon you and on your fate, which, be you sure, shall never be relaxed.—What smoke is that?" he continued, turning to one of the men who came out of the church, from the opening door of which burst forth a volume of dense vapour, while a roaring and crackling sound was heard from within.

"It is only the church, my lord," replied the man, laughing aloud. "You told us to set fire to the place; so we have piled up the stools and benches, and the flame has caught the carved roof already. The old sacristan would fain have stopped us, but Mark and I took him between us, and pitched him on the top of the pile."

"You fools!" exclaimed Meyrand, furiously. "It was but in the fury of the moment I said it—it was but a threat, not intended to be executed. Do you not know that every moment is precious, that we may get back to the castle, and then draw off the men before Brissac and his thousands arrive?—Nay, struggle not, light girl," he continued, turning fiercely to Isabel—"or, by Heaven, I may serve you as they have done the sacristan! Think you that you can contend with me? Come on, come on, there!—bring the priest along—we will hang him over the gate of the castle, to give Brissac his first welcome in."

Thus saying, he caught Isabel up in his arms, passed through another door, by which he avoided the church, and was in a few minutes at the great gates of the abbey.

There, before the portal, with a number of monks around him, in no degree terrified by the fierce men opposed to him, stood the old abbot, bareheaded, and pouring forth anathemas in Italian and Latin upon some sixty or seventy men whom the Count de Meyrand had left without. Those anathemas were redoubled at the sight of the Count's prisoners; but Meyrand, heeding him not, turned to listen for a moment to one of his own followers, who addressed him instantly on his coming forth.

"We must make haste, sir," he said. "Fresh troops are appearing upon the hills, and they have already opened a fire upon the castle, from a place where we saw a small red cross last night."

"To horse!—to horse, then!" said Meyrand; "the castle is not tenable for an hour against any considerable force. We must bring off the men and the treasure that are there, and then retreat upon the places in the rear.—Here, Mark!" he continued, turning to one of those who had just come out of the church, "you are a determined devil—I may have to command as well as to fight. Take this lady up behind you, and remember, your sole business is to make the best of your way to the castle. Fasten her to your belt, so that she cannot escape, and if there should seem a likelihood of her falling into the enemy's hands, hark ye!"—And he whispered

something to the man, which made him look up in his face with an inquiring glance, saying—"What! a woman?"

"Do you hesitate?" demanded Meyrand, bending his brows upon him.

"No, no," replied the man; "I always do what I am bid when I understand it." And with no power to resist, Isabel, drowned in tears and as pale as death, was seated behind the trooper on his horse, and tied tightly to him by several leathern thongs. A moment more, and they were riding on at a quick pace toward the castle of Robeck, the poor girl nearly fainting at every step, yet not happy enough to fall altogether into forgetfulness of her terrible situation.

They had gone about three hundred yards, or perhaps a little more, from the gates of the abbey, and the head of the troop, which was led by the Count himself, had just passed a deep wood of pines that flanked the abbey to the northward, when there came a quick sharp report of fire-arms, and four or five of the foremost horsemen went down at once. The sound recalled Isabel to herself, and she looked suddenly up, when she beheld a troop of armed men coming forward at a full gallop, some armed with spears, and some with drawn swords, upon the body which was bearing her away. She had not time to see anything more than that, though somewhat strangely and wildly armed, they were well prepared for an encounter of the most fierce description—horse and man bristling with various weapons, which any one would now-a-days find great difficulty in employing skilfully.

The charging horse were upon the troop of Count de Meyrand in a moment, uttering a fierce, shrill shout as they came forward; and while Meyrand strove to put his men in some order to receive them, the name of "Corse de Leon! Corse de Leon!" was repeated from trooper to trooper, seeming to fill the hearts of the Count's soldiers with fear.

In another instant, the two bodies met, and all was strife and confusion. Swords flashed around in every direction, and pistol shots were exchanged, with the muzzles almost touching, while hand to hand, and now separated into small groups, the brigands and their opponents fought for life and death, scattered over the open space that intervened between the wood and the castle. Oh, who can tell the feelings of poor Isabel at that moment! She strove once or twice to burst the bonds that held her; but all her efforts were vain, and she had nothing to do but alternately to cover her eyes with her hands, and then glance over the scene again, and

stretch out her arms towards any of the opposite party who happened to be near, while hope and fear continued their agonizing struggle in her heart.

In the meanwhile, the man Mark, who carried her along with him, remembering the orders he had received, strove for nothing but to make himself a way on towards the castle of Robeck, still keeping some of his comrades between himself and the attacking party; or if he crossed swords with any of them, it was but to strike a single well-directed blow and ride on. There was a horseman, however, in the troop of Corse de Leon, who seemed determined to hew a path up toward him. Armed at all points, with his beaver down, the spurs of knighthood upon his heels, his heavy sword playing like a bulrush in his hands, three times he made his way nearly up to the spot where the man Mark was hurrying on, and three times some accidental turn of the fray threw another group of the soldiery in his way.

All went down before him, however; and twice, when Isabel raised her terrified eyes and gazed in that direction, she saw, through the dust and smoke, one of the troopers of the Count de Meyrand cast headlong from his horse by a blow of his arm. The man Mark seemed especially to flee from him, as if, in him, he recognised some one with whom he could not struggle; but at length, just when he was breaking away from the *mêlée* altogether, and spurring on with fury towards the castle, Isabel beheld the knight draw out from amongst the rest also, and gallop fiercely after. A page followed him bearing a spear, but the distance between the pursuer and the pursued, though not actually great, was considerable in such an eager race as that which they now ran. The heart of Isabel sunk with fear as she saw that the knight's charger did not gain much upon them. But the moment after, another horseman darted forth from the midst of the very foremost group of combatants, where all was enveloped in a cloud of smoke and dust. He was covered with black arms from head to foot, but his horse was strong and fresh, and bearing him on lightly, promised to overtake the other ere he could reach the castle. The man Mark measured the distance with his eye. He saw that he could not escape, and after looking round twice at Isabel, he took the rein in his teeth, and without quitting the hold of his sword, drew the dagger from his belt with the left hand.

She understood too well what it meant. "Oh, spare me! spare me!" cried the poor girl; but the man only muttered something between his teeth about doing what he was bid,

and turned in the saddle, as if the better to strike the blow. She looked round with a wild shriek for help, and at the same moment she saw the dark horseman behind raise a pistol in his hand, though still coming on at headlong speed. She closed her eyes, and shrunk down as low as the bonds would allow her—she heard the sharp report of fire-arms—the next instant, she felt the form of the man to whom she was tied reel and waver in the saddle, and, overcome by terror and agitation, she lost all consciousness of what was passing around her.

When Isabel opened her eyes, she was freed from the bonds which had tied her; but the body of a dead trooper lay not far off, and two faces that she knew were gazing at her from their unclosed helmets. The one was that of Corse de Leon, the other that of Bernard de Rohan.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"Most gallantly and nobly done!" exclaimed Brissac, as he witnessed the charge of Corse de Leon and his companions. "Gentlemen, spare not the spur, but see how many of the traitors you can cut off from the castle. De Thermes, would it not be better to point the guns from the village at that body which is making for the bridge?"

All was done as he directed; for his judgment and experience were too well known for De Thermes even to hesitate. The small body of French cavalry dashed after the troopers of the Count de Meyrand, the cannon were fired upon the fugitives; but still about one half of the number escaped; and Meyrand himself now showed all the soldierlike qualities which he really possessed, rallied his men, repulsed the pursuers, brought up the rear in person, and succeeded in leading the remnant of his force into the castle of Robeck.

In the meanwhile, Brissac and De Thermes rode out of the hamlet towards the scene of the conflict, and took up their position upon a little knoll, whence they could see the flight and chase; and such is the effect of long habits of war and bloodshed upon the human mind, that two gallant and kind-hearted men stood and looked on amused, at the turns and doublings of the fugitives and their fierce pursuers—though the game was for human life.

"Who are they bringing in here?" exclaimed Brissac, at

length, as his eye fell upon a group of several others bearing some one along between them. "I fear, De Thermes, it is our poor friend who has met his death in this skirmish, after so many a glorious deed. It cannot be Corse de Leon; for that is surely the Chevalier, mounting his horse there."

"It is a woman," said De Thermes; "don't you see her white garments, my lord?"

"Ha! the fair fugitive, for a thousand crowns!" exclaimed Brissac. "I trust she is not hurt. Let us ride on and see. Would to Heaven we had but a few more men; for with this handful we can never guard against the enemy's retreat up the valley."

Thus saying, he rode slowly forward to meet the little party that was approaching, and soon found that the supposition of De Thermes and himself was right. Although Isabel, thanks to the unerring hand of Corse de Leon, which had shot the trooper through the head at the very moment that her fate seemed beyond hope, was but very slightly hurt by her fall from the horse, yet a cloak had been procured and stretched upon two spears, so as to form a sort of litter, on which some of the men were now carrying her to the village. Bernard de Rohan walked by her on foot, while his page led his charger behind; and at some little distance, giving orders to his men, and calling them once more together from the pursuit, came Corse de Leon, with his usual calm, stern countenance, passing through scenes of strife and bloodshed as tranquil and unruffled as if they formed his native element.

Brissac sprang to the ground as the little train approached; and advancing at once to the lady's side, he said, "I hope you are not hurt, though how you came in the midst of such a scene of slaughter, fair lady, I cannot tell."

"Thank God, I am not hurt!" she replied, "farther than terror and ill-treatment could hurt me. But I hope some one will see speedily for the good Father Willand, whom that cruel man threatened to hang over the gate."

"They have carried him to the castle, lady," said Corse de Leon, who had ridden up. "But if they hurt a hair of his head, they shall rue it, as they have seldom rued anything. My lord, it is time that we should mount to the attack. There is a part of the wall crumbled down behind that little horn-work. They have not men to garnish it, and if once carried, the castle is ours. Have you got ladders, General?"

"A few, and but a few," said De Thermes; "nor are those very good."

"They will do—they will do!" replied Corse de Leon. "If I once reach the top of the wall, they shall not easily dislodge me. Let the ladders be brought out! See—they are opening a fire upon us here.—Carry the lady in!"

Bernard de Rohan had been speaking to Isabel in a low voice, and now bending over her, he kissed her fair brow, with words of hope and promises to join her soon again. She knew where he was going; and all the dreadful scene through which she had just passed, made her but feel the more acutely that an hour, that a moment, might deprive her of him she loved for ever; but for a world she would not have stayed him, or have said one word to dim the light of courage in his eye by doubt or hesitation.

"God bless you, Bernard, and protect you!" she said—"God bless you, and protect you, as he always does the good and brave!" And covering her eyes to conceal the drops that were in them, she suffered the soldiers to bear her onward into the village.

Her lover gazed after her for a single moment, and then casting away all thoughts but of the coming enterprise, he turned to where Brissac stood. The Maréchal grasped him by the hand, but said, laughingly, as he pointed to his visor, "You should have had that down, my friend. However, this is a scene in which no one knows the other. Monsieur de Thermes being commander-in-chief, I am not the Maréchal de Brissac here, and you, of course, none of us are acquainted with, except as the gallant unknown leader, who has planted the standard of France upon the walls of five fortresses within the space of four-and-thirty days."

"Another half-hour passed," said Corse de Leon, with a grave and meaning smile—"another half-hour passed, and he shall not need to hide his face or to conceal his name from any one.—Come, Baron, come! Within those walls lies you fate and fortune. I told you that Corse de Leon would lead you, even with all your renown, on the path to honour; and that he, the Brigand, would undo what kings have done. Here are the ladders. Come, let us see which will be within that castle first. Monsieur de Brissac, wait here, and judge between us; and be ready to ride in; for if he or I be, either of us, alive at the end of half-an-hour, the gates shall be thrown open and the drawbridge down."

"We will see," said Bernard de Rohan, laughing—"we will see. Give me a banner!—some one give me a banner!"

"Now, friends," cried Corse de Leon, turning to his fol-

lowers, who, while this was passing, had sprung to the ground, and were arrayed in a close band behind him—"now, my friends, each man amongst us may have something to repent of: now is the time, by great deeds and good ones, to clear all away, and to cast our reproach upon the heads of the traitors within those walls. Follow me on, then!—and if any man waver, let his neighbour put his dagger in his throat, that the world may still believe there never was a coward amongst us."

Thus saying, with a scaling-ladder in one hand and his drawn sword in the other, he rushed forward at the head of his men, and took his way straight to the horn-work he had mentioned; but finding it undefended, he pushed on at once to the bastion, where, by some accident, a part of the wall had given way. There, however, the whole force of the garrison had been collected to repel the assault, and a tremendous fire was opened upon the storming party as it approached. Several men went down at once as soon as they had passed the horn-work; and Brissac and De Thermes, becoming somewhat alarmed for the result, rode on, commanding a small party of arquebusiers to advance and cover the attack.

The two generals came speedily to a spot where they could see more distinctly; and there, though that part of the wall where the assault was taking place seemed every moment but one mingled sheet of fire and smoke, they beheld the ladders firmly placed, and man after man struggling up, and hewing a path for himself amidst the pikes and swords which opposed them from above. Every means was resorted to that the place supplied to repel the attack: masses of stones were cast down upon the heads of the storming party; long pikes and hooks which tore them from the ladders, and cast them into the fosse below, were plied amongst them; and everything evinced that the defence was made by men fighting with the fierceness of utter despair. But still, in the midst of all, the brigands forced their way on; and though more than one, both of the assailants and the defenders, were seen to fall headlong down through the smoke and flame, yet it soon became evident, by the progress of the waving swords and levelled pikes, that the scene of strife had moved its place, and that many of the assailants had gained the summit of the wall. Then the cloud of smoke and flame was seen to roll slowly on, as, fighting with desperate determination, the defenders were driven along the summit of the wall itself; and then took place a loud explosion, as if some magazine

had blown up, or a mine had been sprung, while a dense dark vapour rose, and covered everything from the sight.

Brissac looked at De Thermes, and De Thermes at Brissac, in silence and apprehension; but a moment after, a light wind wafted the cloud of smoke away; and standing upon a salient angle of the nearest wall, appeared Bernard de Rohan, waving the standard of France above his head, as if to announce that the victory was won.

"Now, my good friends," cried Brissac, turning to the officers near him, "you see what these brigands will do when they are hearty in a cause; and let no man tell me I have done wrong in employing them. But come, there is the gate of the castle open, and, if I mistake not, Corse de Leon himself standing on the drawbridge. Let us go in—let us go in! One of you, gentlemen, ride back to the village, and tell the fair lady whom you will find there, that all is safe, and the place taken."

It was with some hesitation that one of them took this task upon himself, for all were anxious to follow Brissac, who now advanced with De Thermes and the small party of arquebusiers, which had been brought forward to support the storming party.

Corse de Leon had by this time retired from the bridge, and only one of the brigands remained stationed at the gate. The arquebusiers, however, immediately took possession of various points as they came up, and riding on into the court, Brissac and his followers dismounted, and entered the great hall of the keep. Three wounded men were lying there; but no other person was to be seen, except the page of Bernard de Rohan, who had followed his master unscathed through the struggle of the day.

"Where is your lord, my good boy?" demanded the Maréchal. "You are a gallant young soldier as ever I saw, and shall not be forgotten."

"My lord, sir," replied the youth, colouring with delight, "is gone to seek for somebody with the Chevalier Lenoir."

"Is the Count de Meyrand dead, or taken?" demanded Brissac.

"He has escaped by the postern, they say, sir," answered the page, "and gone with five or six others up the valley, but all the rest are killed or taken."

"Have you seen a good priest they carried off?" asked Brissac. "I hope they have not hurt our poor friend, who has so often made us merry in court and camp, and was, besides, so true a man."

"Oh, no, sir!" replied the boy. "Father Willand I saw a minute ago, and helped to cut the thongs that tied him with my own dagger. He is in a room above, shriving one of the dying men, who was governor of the castle, they say, before the Count came."

"Let us go on," said Brissac; "there is something here to be discovered yet. Corse de Leon is not a man to say aught lightly, and he promised things that I would fain see verified."

Thus speaking, he led the way through all the chambers on the ground-floor of the keep, meeting from time to time some of the captors, but not the persons that he sought. At length the sound of voices reached him and De Thermes, as they stood near the mouth of a low-browed arch, which seemed to lead down by a flight of steps into vaults and dungeons below; and a moment or two after, Corse de Leon himself, with Bernard de Rohan and two or three others carrying torches, appeared coming up the stairs, and speaking together eagerly.

The first words that Brissac heard were from the lips of Bernard de Rohan. "It is time, my good friend," he said, "that you should tell me who and what we are seeking."

"We are seeking the only person," replied Corse de Leon, "who can at once clear you of a crime wherewith you have been charged. Let us return to that man we left dying above. I will find means to wring the fact out of him, for he must know it.—Oh, my Lord de Brissac," he continued, seeing the Maréchal, "you are welcome to the castle of Robeck! Let us come in here, into what they call the stone hall, and then, I beg you, hear what I have to say."

"This noble gentleman who stands before you," continued Corse de Leon, after they had entered a large paved room on the right, "has been accused by that base man to whom these castles lately belonged, of a deed of blood which he never committed. But as men's laws were made for the purpose of torturing the innocent and securing the guilty, the accused was speedily the condemned; and they thought it great mercy that they did not put him to the rack, to make him confess an act of which he knew nothing. He would soon have been executed, had he not made his escape, by means, my lord Maréchal, which it is needless to detail. Some months after all this took place, a humble person, but a man of a good heart and a stout sword, met with the Italian bravo upon whose word, as the chief testimony, French judges condemned a French noble of unspotted name, and a French

king refused him the slightest mercy. This humble friend needed no testimony but what he knew himself, to prove to him that the bravo was a murderer and a villain; and being fond of a shorter, a more practicable, and a juster code of laws of his own than those which they teach in great cities, he proceeded at once to punish the evil doer, and to force him to confess who it was that had committed the act whereof he had accused another. To have done with circumlocution, my lord, and knowing that I can trust you, I will add, that this man Geronimo, the hired assassin and serviceable villain of the Lord of Masseran, was met by Corse de Leon one day in the woods and marshes of Chalamont; that they fought, and that the Brigand would not kill his enemy, because he was resolved to wring the truth from him regarding the death of Henry of Brienne. The man was badly wounded, however, and died afterwards; but before his death he acknowledged two things, that Bernard de Rohan had no hand whatever in the deed, and —— Ha! Father Willand! The man above is not dead, is he?"

"There must be some one wounded near this spot," said Brissac, before the priest could answer; "for I am certain that a moment ago I heard a smothered cry, as of some one beseeching aid.—Let the wounded have help, whosoever they be."

"Oh! the foxes of the earth are dull beasts!" exclaimed Father Willand, who had entered the moment before, "and so they well may be, when the wolves have taken to lapping milk, and the lions mew like a cat. Out of my way, Bernard de Rohan—you marrier of ladies without the King's leave! You have heartily been punished for your five minutes' rebellion. Out of my way, Maréchal de Brissac—for though your eyes were sharp enough to see that your friend was not guilty, you have not had the wit to prove that he was innocent. Out of my way, Corse de Leon—for though you have spun a long clue as well as any old woman in the land, you have not known how to bring it to an end; while, for Father Willand, poor despised Father Willand, with all his bones aching from being carried like a sack of wheat over the haunches of a hard-trotting horse, is reserved the great achievement of the whole!—Now bring me two strong cords. —See for a bottle of good wine, if there be one left in the castle, and a slice of bread fit for a hungry man."

"What is the meaning of all this?" said Brissac, somewhat sharply. "I thought I heard that cry again."

"And so you did, my most noble Maréchal!" replied the

priest. "But you would oblige me much by standing back from this table, which you have gathered round. Now, Bernard de Rohan, thrust your dagger into the chink between that dark stone and the other, and raise it up!"

The party of gentlemen spread back at the priest's words, and just under the table round which they were standing, there appeared a stone of about three foot square, of a somewhat darker colour than the rest, and which, when examined closely, seemed evidently separated from the others that formed the pavement. Bernard de Rohan immediately did as the priest directed, but at first the stone would not yield to all his strength. He then went to the other side, and thrust his dagger between it and the next stone, when it rose heavily up, disclosing the mouth of a sort of pit or dungeon, where not the slightest ray of light was visible. Horror seized upon all present; but that horror was increased when a voice was heard from below, exclaiming, "O God! have you come to help me? Have pity upon me! Have pity upon me!"

"Heaven and earth!" exclaimed Bernard de Rohan, "I should know that voice!"

"Bring ropes!—bring ropes quick!" exclaimed the Maréchal de Brissac; but without waiting for them, Bernard de Rohan cast himself down by the side of the pit, and stretched out his arm to its utmost extent, exclaiming, "Can you reach my hand?" Corse de Leon did the same on the other side; and by an effort of their great strength, the two powerful men raised up from the bottom of the pit a pale, thin, squalid figure, clothed in garments which had once been rich, but were now reduced to noisome rags.

The moment he stood upon the firm ground, Bernard de Rohan, with wild and anxious eyes, held him at a distance, and gazed eagerly in his face. Then exclaiming, "It is—it is!" he threw wide his arms, and Henry of Brienne sprung forward to his bosom!

Let not the reader, strange as this tale may seem, believe that it is false, for such is not the case; and all the important circumstances will be found recorded in the Life of the Maréchal de Brissac.*

"Give him some wine—give him some wine," said Father

* By the important circumstances, I mean the supposed murder, the trial of the friend, the confession of the servant under the torture, and the ultimate discovery of the man believed to be murdered, in one of the castles of the Lord of Masseran, in a loathsome dungeon, concealed by one of the stones of the pavement, with many other minute particulars mentioned in these pages.

Willand, who, accustomed in the various duties of his calling to witness the effect of great emotion, knew what must be the sensations of the poor youth at that moment, and what was likely to be the result.

Before any assistance of the kind could be afforded, however, Henry of Brienne had fainted away, and it was some time before he could be brought to himself. Bernard de Rohan, the page, and the priest, tended him, while De Thermes proceeded on his military round through the castle; but Brissac, turning to Corse de Leon, exclaimed, "This is a new miracle of your working, indeed, my good friend! You were going to tell us of another acknowledgment, however, which the man you so justly punished made, before his death. Was it of the fact which we behold here?"

"Not so, not so," replied Corse de Leon. "No, he acknowledged that Bernard de Rohan had no hand in the deed, and, moreover, he told me that here I should find one who would explain all and clear up all. He spoke confusedly and hurriedly, for the confession he made was at the point of death; but the other acknowledgment I spoke of was, that the body of the man which was found in the forest was not that of the Count of Brienne, but that of his servant, who had been killed in defence of his master. I had some vague hope that it might be as it has proved; for the man, Geronimo, stoutly denied, even to his last gasp, that he had killed the young Count. See, my lord, however—see! he revives, and he himself will tell you more."

Henry of Brienne, however, had but little to tell. Wine and food soon gave him back some degree of strength, and then, while all who were present crowded round him, he related exactly what had happened between him and Bernard de Rohan, as his friend himself had told it.

"I was foolish," he said, addressing himself to the young cavalier: "I was mad, I believe. But the cause of my whole conduct was, that I had solemnly pledged myself to separate you and Isabel from each other. I knew not how to do it. I was confused and embarrassed; and, as so often has happened to me before, I acted wildly, rashly, and wrongly, in seeking to free myself from a situation of difficulty in which I did not know how to behave. The thing of all others I sought to avoid was, that you and I together should come up with my sister; and yet not knowing to what difficulties she might be exposed, I did not choose either to abandon the search, or ask you to abandon it. Angry with myself, and everything else, I determined to drive you from me, and your

perseverance in accompanying me only served to irritate and drive me nearly wild. How I behaved, you know, alas! too well: but after you were gone, I forded the stream, and rode some way on towards Bourg, till, recollecting that I had left my servant behind, and that I expected messengers from that villain of Masseran, I turned back again towards Nantua, after sleeping at a cottage on that side of the river; but I met those I sought, on their way to overtake me, at a village some fifteen or sixteen miles behind. This was the day after we had parted, and I found that the messengers which the Lord of Masseran had sent were three in number, headed by the man Geronimo, who told me with great affected concern, that he had been much alarmed on my account, for that at Ceyserat he had heard of your passing alone. He had sought in the forest, he said, and found marks of blood, but had come on to seek me. As he bore me fresh instructions—apparently from the King himself—to prevent Isabel from holding any communication with you whatsoever, I explained to him the circumstances which had caused us to part, and the quarrel between us. Whether he had been before instructed to carry me off, or whether the diabolical plot then entered into his head, I know not, but he urged me strongly to set out accompanied by him and the rest, in order to overtake you before you discovered the further course of Isabel, who we had reason to believe had left the straight road to Macon. He persuaded me that, by crossing the forest and taking the ford, I should save a considerable distance; but while I was riding along that same sandy road, down which you followed me, talking to him of the state in which he had left matters in Paris, he suddenly sprang upon me, and before I could defend myself, or make even a preparation for resistance, I was pulled from my horse, tied hand and foot, and gagged so that I could not utter a sound. While this was taking place, the poor fellow who accompanied me had drawn his sword and nearly overcome one of the traitors; the others, however, turned upon him the moment I was secured, and I had the horror of seeing him butchered before my face. They then stripped him of his own garments, and clothed him in a suit of mine, which they found in the valise upon his horse, and I easily divined that their purpose was to make the world believe that I was dead, as doubtless they have since done. Two of them dragged the body away, leaving me under the guard of the third, and did not return for near an hour; after which they carried me, too, into one of the deepest parts of the wood, and there kept me till after night had fallen. I was

then placed on horseback, and tied on, and after a long night's journey found myself in Savoy. The following day was passed upon the mountain side, but one of them went to some town or village and procured food, and in the middle of the next night I was brought hither. That dungeon has been my abode ever since. The air is admitted to it by a small hole cut through the solid rock, and food was let down to me by a thin string and a hook once every night. Why he did not kill me I cannot tell; and strange to say, notwithstanding the horrible state in which I was kept, I did not seek or wish for death. I always had a hope—I may almost call it an expectation—that my fate would undergo a change; and even from the very depth of the misery in which I was plunged, this hope received light. I thought it was impossible that the good God could leave me always so, however wrongly I might have behaved to him who had been the friend of my youth."

"And that friend, my good young gentleman," said the Maréchal de Brissac, "has since then been accused of your murder, tried, and condemned; has made his escape from prison; and has from that moment been here in exile serving his country at the very time he was most unjustly treated. Your sister is also a fugitive, but she is luckily safe in the village below; and you may now have the happiness of removing for ever the stain from your friend's honour, and of conferring upon him, I trust, as many blessings as he has lately endured miseries."

CHAPTER XLIV.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon of the day on which the castle of Robeck was taken, that as Bernard de Rohan was sitting beside Isabel de Brienne, with her right hand clasped in his, and her left resting in that of her brother, the Maréchal de Brissac entered the small cottage room where they sat, with a brow not only grave and thoughtful, but even sad. He was followed by a gentleman of a somewhat stern mien, and by two or three attendants unarmed, who seemed, by the dusty state of their apparel, to have journeyed far that day.

"My dear De Rohan," said Brissac, as he entered, "it is, I believe, destined in this world, that no day of happiness and success should ever end without a touch of bitter, and

such, I am afraid, is to be the case with you, although the bitter will be very light in comparison with the sweetness of this day. I know not whether you are acquainted with Monsieur de Nansé; but, I am sorry to say, he comes to seek you on the part of the King, who has heard of your place of refuge, and has commanded this gentleman to carry you a prisoner to Paris."

"It is only happy, sir," said Bernard de Rohan, addressing De Nansé, who was an officer of Henry's guard—"it is only happy that you arrived not a day sooner, or I might have been prevented thereby from discovering the incontestable proofs of my innocence of the crime with which I have been charged."

"It is happy, sir," answered De Nansé, stiffly; "for I was ordered by the King, notwithstanding the services which we are told you have rendered here, to bring you to Paris in chains."

The colour rose in Bernard de Rohan's cheek. "That was somewhat harsh," he said; "and although I have certainly been condemned for the death of a man still living, which was strange enough, I might still have been surprised to be brought to Paris in chains for an act that had never been committed. This, sir," he continued, somewhat provoked at the cold and bitter aspect of De Nansé—"this, sir, is Henry Count de Brienne, whom I murdered, according to the decree of various wise men sitting at the Châtelet."

"I have the honour of recollecting Monsieur de Brienne well," replied De Nansé, "and the sight of his person here will dispense with the necessity of my putting you in chains, but not of my carrying you to Paris, sir. There are other matters which the King may have to inquire into. One of the charges mentioned to me was, having drawn your sword within the royal precincts. The King visited that offence severely upon my poor cousin of Meyrand, and by driving him to despair, doubtless cast him into rebellion. He is not likely, therefore, to pass over the act in you."

"I had forgotten," replied Bernard de Rohan, "your near connexion with Monsieur de Meyrand. The King's pleasure, however, sir, must be obeyed, and shall be obeyed by me without more words, for I trust to be able fully to justify myself; and as the event has proved that I was guiltless of one charge, I doubt not I shall be believed when I assert that I am innocent of the other. Dearest Isabel," he continued, "I fear that we must part."

"Yes, Bernard," she replied, with a smile struggling through

the tears which had gathered in her eyes; "but now we part in good hope; when we last parted, it was in despair."

"Whatever be your own ultimate fate, sir," said De Nansé, in a tone somewhat softened—"whatever be your own ultimate fate, the lady will not be far separated from you at present—though separated she must be. The King is aware of her having taken refuge on the borders of France and Savoy, and my orders are to bring her to Paris also—you, as rapidly as possible, leaving the lady under the charge of some of my attendants, to follow with such speed as may suit her convenience."

While all this passed, Henry of Brienne had remained silent, and Brissac stood gnawing his lip with evident mortification; but when his sister was mentioned, the young Count started up, his pale face glowing somewhat angrily, while he exclaimed, "My sister shall come to Paris, but not under the charge of any of your attendants, while her brother has an arm to protect her, and a right to guide and guard her."

De Nansé gazed at him for a moment with a calm, supercilious air, and then turning to Brissac, he said, "You know the King's orders, Monsieur de Brissac, and I must look to you for the means of enforcing them."

Henry of Brienne was about to burst forth with his usual wild and somewhat uncontrollable vehemence; but Brissac interposed, saying, "Monsieur de Nansé, the King, when he gave the orders which you mention, was totally unaware of the extraordinary change of circumstances which has taken place this day. He knew not that Monsieur de Rohan, by one accidental discovery, would be totally freed from every imputation which has been cast upon him: and that—as the other charge made against him was founded upon the evidence of those persons who brought the false and iniquitous accusation from which he is now freed—it is probable that charge was as false and iniquitous as the other. Neither did the King know, sir, that the brother of Mademoiselle de Brienne was alive, present, and willing to conduct her himself to his majesty's court, therefore——"

"But it is necessary, sir," said De Nansé, sharply, "and I insist that——"

"Do not knit your brows at me, sir," said the Maréchal de Brissac, "and do not presume to use the word insist within my government. I will surrender Monsieur de Rohan into your hands, upon the condition, and with the understanding, that you carry him to the King's presence with all gentlemanly courtesy and attention, recollecting that the only real and

substantial cause of your being sent hither upon such a mission, is now removed. In regard to Mademoiselle de Brienne, if my young friend, her brother, here, undertakes to escort her to the King's presence with all convenient speed, his majesty's commands will be obeyed with sufficient accuracy."

"Well, sir, well," said De Nansé, "if you choose to take the responsibility of these things upon yourself, the consequences be upon your own head."

"Be they so, sir, replied Brissac; "I have not, in general, shrunk from responsibility: and, moreover, I shall take upon myself to fix the time of departure, which shall be to-morrow morning. Monsieur de Rohan may well be considered too much fatigued to-night, by great exertions in the service of the King, to undertake the journey without repose. Bernard," he continued, turning to De Rohan, "you must consider yourself in my custody for the present, as I make myself your godfather, and answer for your appearance. I must now go to send off a trumpet towards the Milanese frontier, announcing the signature of peace and the cessation of hostilities on all parts. At the same time, I shall demand that the Count de Meyrand be given up to France, as a traitor and a rebel; and perhaps he may have more difficulty in justifying himself than those whom he has accused. Monsieur de Nansé, you will do me the honour of supping with me at the quarters of Monsieur de Thermes: De Rohan, I shall expect to see you there for an hour before bed-time." Thus saying, he made room for Monsieur de Nansé to pass out before him, and left the little party together, as he had found them.

An hour or two passed over—notwithstanding the somewhat painful interruption which had taken place—in tranquil happiness, such as Bernard and Isabel had not known for many years. They neither of them would believe for a moment that there was any farther ill in store for them, or that the charge in regard to a violation of the precincts of the royal residence would not vanish away like an idle vapour. The events of that day had been so bright and happy altogether—the restoration of Henry of Brienne, as it seemed, from the very grave—the clearing of Bernard de Rohan's name from every stain—the delivery of Isabel herself from the persecution of the Lord de Masseran and the Count de Meyrand—all had the natural effect of inspiring hope, with visions of happiness which seemed almost prophetical. It had been like one of those bright and golden summer days which we cannot see go down in splendour and majesty, without anti-

cipating a clear and glowing morrow, though there be a cloud or two upon the edge of the western sky.

At length, as the hour of repose approached, Bernard de Rohan prepared to depart. He pressed Isabel fondly to his heart. He gazed for a moment with a sigh, and yet a smile too, on the ring which she still bore upon her finger—the ring which he had placed there at the altar now nearly a year before; but his heart was firm and true, and raising that hand to his lips, he kissed it tenderly and devotedly, and left her.

When he arrived at the house where Brissac had taken up his quarters with De Thermes, he found that the Maréchal had quitted the supper table, at which the others, after the fashion of soldiers, were still revelling in honour of their success. The Maréchal was in another room, but not alone; for seated beside him was good Father Willand, who was in the act of telling him how he had discovered from the dying words of De Masseran's officer, in the castle of Robeck, the place in which Henry de Brienne was confined.

Their previous conversation, however, had turned upon other things; and the moment the young cavalier entered, Brissac renewed the subject.

"I have wished to consult with you, De Rohan," he said, "before you go, for this treaty of peace places me in many respects in a situation of embarrassment. In regard to your own fate, De Rohan, though that sour and evil spirit in De Nansé and the rest of the powerful relations of Meyrand may give you some annoyance, yet I look upon your happiness as quite secure. There is a good friend of ours, however, to whom I am not ashamed to say that I owe much, with whom this peace must place me in a difficult and painful situation. You will easily understand that I mean Corse de Leon. When I first came into Piedmont, I had made a resolution of exterminating all the various bands of brigands which were scattered over the country, and you may remember that I executed many. This determination was more especially taken in regard to the troop of the famous Corse de Leon, then consisting of more than two hundred men. He set all my measures at defiance, however, while I easily got hold of inferior leaders. As I did so, I gradually discovered that many of these bands consisted of men driven to despair by the tyranny and oppression of their petty Italian lords, and I gradually fell upon the plan of offering them their choice between death and regular service under me. In the meantime, I every day heard more and more of this extraordinary man, of his generosity, his daring, his wisdom, and even his humanity

and kindness. I heard of peasants and humble citizens protected, supported, and relieved. I heard of base plans and iniquitous schemes frustrated in the most marvellous manner. I heard, indeed, of signal and somewhat barbarous acts of vengeance upon oppressors, extortioners, and evil doers, while, at the same time, I had myself indubitable proofs of skill and talent, such as are rarely met with. Thus I adopted gradually very different views with regard to Corse de Leon. I acted, perhaps, somewhat rashly in the business, cast myself almost entirely into his power, but succeeded in making him a friend, and have since, from his aid, derived infinite benefit to the cause of France. How, then, am I to deal with him now? I must not suffer him—if I remain in command here—I must not suffer him, I say, to carry on the system in which I found him engaged; but, at the same time, I cannot show myself so ungrateful to him as to cast him off the moment his services are no longer needful to me. Father Willand here," he continued, "advises me to offer him some high command in the army under me, and I would stretch my authority to the very utmost so to gratify him. What think you, De Rohan?"

"I fear, my lord," replied the young cavalier—"I fear that he will not accept it. But your only way is to see him yourself, and to speak to him frankly and boldly, as you always do. At all events, he will understand and appreciate your conduct, and perhaps point out himself some means of freeing you from your present embarrassment. When are you likely to see him?"

"Immediately," replied De Brissac. "He promised to visit me here this night. But stay you with me—both of you—and let us all try to persuade him to what is right."

"Ay, Maréchal!" answered the priest; "but recollect that there are many sorts of right in this world. What is right for the lion is not right for the lamb. You do not put a bottle of Avignon claret* into an earthen pitcher. What suits Brissac wont suit Corse de Leon. So don't make up your mind, as most men do, to think everybody in the wrong that is not pleased with what pleases you."

Some farther conversation took place, but no new suggestion was elicited; and in about a quarter of an hour Corse de Leon himself entered the room unannounced, and placed himself standing at the end of the table opposite Brissac. His countenance was mournful and somewhat stern; and

* The first wine that I find called claret is the wine of Avignon, very different from that to which we now give the name.

Brissac, feeling that he had an ungrateful task to perform, laid aside the usual ceremony which he maintained as governor of Piedmont, and going round, shook the Brigand by the hand.

Corse de Leon gazed in his countenance with a meaning smile. "I have heard the news, my lord!" he said. "Peace is signed! A peace as disgraceful to France as it is advantageous to our enemies, and especially to the great tyrant of the day, Philip of Spain. I have heard the news! I have heard the news! And now, my lord, to make the way easy for you, I will speak upon one of the subjects which embarrass you in this matter. There must be many that both embarrass and grieve you, or I know not the Maréchal de Brissac. But to the matter in hand. Peace is signed; and you do not know what to do with Corse de Leon! The very hesitation does you honour, my lord. There is scarcely any other general in Europe who would not bring his provost, with half-a-dozen arquebusiers to the back of that door, and have out the Brigand in the churchyard, and shoot him within half-an-hour."

"Nay, nay!" answered Brissac, laughing, "I would rather be shot myself, my good friend; but you have touched upon my embarrassment. You know that in this government of Savoy I must maintain an established order, now that peace is restored. In the meantime, I scruple not to acknowledge before these two, as I would before the whole world, that in the latter wars of Piedmont you have served me nobly, generously, and bravely. I would fain recover you from this wild and wandering life which you pursue, and at the same time offer you that high distinction and rank which you merit. Doubtless we shall have to maintain a very strict and careful watch upon the frontier of the Milanese, especially towards the mountains; and if you will consent, you shall have the command of that district, together with two of what are called The New Bands, and a couple of companies of pikes. You will form your own men into another company, and having the formal, authorized command of the whole, will be under the orders of no one but myself."

The Brigand smiled, not exactly contemptuously, but certainly with a look of amusement, at the very proposal. "What, Monsieur de Brissac!" he said, "Corse de Leon a colonel of *gens-d'armes?* Oh! my good lord, that were a miracle, indeed! which would make the fishes of Como raise their heads out of the water to see it, more merrily than they

did to hear the preaching of Saint Anthony of Padua. No, my good lord! No!—When you train the chamois of the mountains to draw farmers' carts, then you may hope to see Corse de Leon manœuvring his men at a *montre*."

"But what then can I do for you?" said Brissac. "Name it, my good friend; name it. I ask you, as a new service and a new favour, after many, to deliver me from the difficulty in which I am placed regarding you."

"My lord, you are a noble gentleman!" replied Corse de Leon, warmly; "and I thank you for making me think well of at least one man in high station; but it is not I who will deliver you from the difficulty in which you are placed. Time will do it—ay, and very speedily! With all your knowledge of courts, you are deceived as to your future situation. You will not long have any difficulty with the affairs of Piedmont at all, nor with those of Corse de Leon either."

"How so? How so?" demanded Brissac. "Have you any news from Paris?"

"More certain than you have, my lord," replied Corse de Leon. "You only know that peace is signed. I have to tell you, that Savoy and Piedmont are to be restored to the Duke, together with Corsica and all that you have gained upon the side of the Milanese. Five towns alone are to be retained for France, merely as security for the execution of the treaty."

"By Heaven!" exclaimed Brissac, starting up, "I will resist for the honour of my country, and with my own hand carry on the war. I and my soldiers in this are one. Let the King of France, if he have signed this act, put us to the ban as rebels, so that he may not himself be compromised by our deeds; but let me maintain the glory of my country, and hold for her those territories which we have won for her with our blood."*

"If such be your determination, my lord," replied Corse de Leon, "and if you so act, I will be your soldier, too—so then the difficulty will be at an end."

"That is to say," cried the priest, laughing, "there is only one trade he can choose if prevented from being a brigand, which is that of a rebel. No, no! my good Lord of Brissac, if it were not for many another consideration, you would never set the example of opposing the will of your sovereign,

* These are the very words afterwards addressed by Brissac to the King of France himself.

nor show one more great and noble man in arms against legitimate authority."

Brissac bowed his head upon his hands and sat silent, while Corse de Leon added, "I have told you what I know, my lord—there is much more, of which I am as sure as if I had seen it. They will disband your troops. They will take from you your government. They will leave your soldiers to follow Corse de Leon, and yourself without reward or recompence. I repeat again, that such is the baseness of courts and statesmen, that your gallant troops, ere three months be over, will be brigands among these mountains."

"No, no, no!" exclaimed Brissac, vehemently; "that they will never be."

"Where will they find bread?" demanded Corse de Leon. "I know the intention is gone forth to disband them. Where will they find bread?"

"In my house," replied Brissac, "as long as I am alive and have it to share with them. But, my good friend," he added, more calmly, "I will not doubt that what you have told me is true; and if it be so, the difficulty is removed from me. I will never treat as an enemy the man who has fought by my side as a friend; but if Piedmont be given up to the Duke of Savoy, with the Duke of Savoy will you have to deal."

"And with the Duke of Savoy I will deal!" replied Corse de Leon, significantly. "In the meantime, I will betake myself to the mountains, beyond the range of your command. I have some traffic to carry on with one or two good lords in the Milanese. There was one of them—last Saturday was ten days—flogged a poor peasant lad to death for defending the honour of his bride, and striking the keeper of the toll upon the river. He forgot that there was such a man as Corse de Leon, and I must call it to his mind. With this and other things somewhat like it, I shall have good occupation for my time till you, my lord, are gone; so you need not be uneasy about me."

"Nay, but I still am," replied Brissac: "I would fain give you some token of my gratitude. I would fain, too, see you devote your vast courage and the great powers of your mind to some more noble, great, and expansive things than those which now occupy you."

"Oh, let me join my voice, too!" said Bernard de Rohan. "You have been my friend, my companion, my deliverer! Make me, oh, make me proud of the man to whom I owe such benefits! and instead of glorying in pursuits which

have become but too odious by the deeds of others, carry your strong arm, your noble heart, and your powerful mind to the achievement of some noble undertaking, to the support of some noble cause! Is not the infidel, even now, preparing to attack the last Christian bulwark in the Mediterranean?"

"You forget," replied Corse de Leon, with a curling lip, "that the blood which flows in these veins is not noble; that I cannot, that I must not show myself amongst the brethren of St. John but as a servitor. No, no!" he added, crossing his arms upon his broad chest; "for awhile longer I will live as I have lived; but I see things gathering far in the north which will end in a tempest fit for me to move in. I see, too, under those dark clouds, the dawning of a light which shall bring forth a new day upon the world. I see the time coming when the Spanish tyrant shall bow before the indignant vigour of a roused-up nation. I see, not far off, the time when an oppressed people shall break the chains that bind them, and call to the free and generous hearts of every land for aid, encouragement, and support. When that time comes, my friends—and I dare to call you so—you may perchance see Corse de Leon with another name, winning honour in the way that you would have him!"

Thus saying, he turned and left them, and was heard of no more in Savoy till his prophecy was accomplished in the shameful abandonment of Brissac and his soldiers.

CHAPTER XLV.

Although Monsieur de Nansé had received distinct orders to hasten his return to Paris with Bernard de Rohan, several weeks elapsed ere the journey was accomplished; and every excuse that human ingenuity could devise was resorted to with a view to delay their arrival in the capital. Now, the chancellor directed the captain of the King's guard to wait at Fountainbleau for farther orders. Now, the King was said to be at Villers-Cotterets; and it was necessary to send thither to know whether the prisoner should be brought there or not: then news arrived that the royal party had left that place, and a new delay occurred to give time for inquiry as to where it had gone.

The secret of all this was, that the friends of the Count de Meyrand and the many noble families with whom he was connected, were using every endeavour to a obtain pardon

for his past conduct, and to prejudice the mind of the King against one whom they justly considered as his enemy. They feared that these schemes and purposes would be overthrown by the coming of Bernard de Rohan to Paris; and in Monsieur de Nansé they found a willing instrument in keeping him away from the capital.

At length, however, Bernard de Rohan would no longer be trifled with. There was no pretence now either for keeping from him his attendants, or debarring him from communication with his friends; and he found that Isabel herself had reached Paris before him. In the letter by which she informed him of this fact, she told him that the King himself was in the capital, and had been so for some time; that she had not been admitted to his presence, however; and that she feared there were many intrigues taking place in order to influence the royal mind.

The moment that he received this letter, Bernard de Rohan sat down and addressed the King himself, in writing, demanding to be admitted to his presence, and informing him that he had been detained for several weeks, unwillingly and unreasonably, at a distance from the court. As soon as Monsieur de Nansé appeared, the young nobleman notified to him what he had done; but the captain of the guard, now driven from all evasion, informed him that it was his intention to carry him immediately to Paris.

"In the first place, however, Monsieur de Rohan," he continued, endeavouring to bend his features into a persuasive smile, which was not at all natural to them—"in the first place, Monsieur de Rohan, I have a proposal to make to you on behalf of the friends and family of Monsieur de Meyrand, which, as a generous and kind-hearted gentleman, you will, I am sure, consent to. It is merely this: the whole of that family—and you must know how influential it is—will join their voice to yours in beseeching the King to sanction at once your marriage with Mademoiselle de Brienne, provided that you not only abstain from saying anything to inculpate farther my cousin Adrian, but do also yourself petition his majesty to grant him a pardon for the past, and suffer him to return to France."

Bernard de Rohan gazed upon him with indignation, and replied at once, "Monsieur de Nansé, if you had not proposed to me this matter in the terms of a negotiation, I might have been tempted, at your solicitation, to do all that I could in favour of Monsieur de Meyrand; but, by holding out to me, as an inducement, your interest to obtain the hand of

Mademoiselle de Brienne—to which I have an undoubted right, and with the disposal of which you have nothing to do whatever—you prevent me from saying one word in support of the object you desire. I will hear no more upon the subject, sir. The hand of Isabel de Brienne is not a bribe which you can dispose of at your pleasure."

"Very well, Baron! very well!" replied De Nansé, with a bitter smile. "You may have forgotten his majesty swore by his honour and his life, that so long as he wore the crown, you should never wed the lady, if you drew your sword upon the Count de Meyrand. The King may have forgotten it too; but he shall soon be made to remember it, if you continue in the resolution which you have expressed."

"I shall not change it," replied De Rohan, firmly; but, at the same time, the words of his companion created some unpleasant feelings of apprehension in regard to the view which Henry might take of his oath.

On the next day, towards noon, a packet arrived, the contents of which caused Monsieur de Nansé's brow to contract heavily. Orders were immediately given, however, for saddling horses, and for preparing to proceed to the capital; and ere night, Bernard de Rohan, with such attendants as he had now gathered round him, the King's officer, and a small party of guards, were once more on their way towards Paris. They did not go far, however, that evening, as Monsieur de Nansé had still a courier to send off, in order that his friends might fully prepare the way for what was no longer avoidable—an interview between Bernard de Rohan and the King himself.

It was in the evening of a bright summer's day that Bernard de Rohan once more entered the capital of his native country; and the aspect of the gay and cheerful metropolis of a gay and cheerful people seemed to offer to his eyes a more lively and bustling scene than it had ever before presented; more living beings moving, thronging, singing, talking, in streets, in doorways, in shops, and at windows, than he had ever before beheld.

This was not only in the seeming, but, perhaps, it was true; for those days were days of peculiar merriment and splendour in the French capital. The nation was rejoicing at the newly-recovered peace, and cared not what had been paid for it. The royal espousals of Philip of Spain to the unfortunate Elizabeth, and the Duke of Savoy to another princess of France, gave new interest to the times; and the magnificent and chivalrous monarch who then sat upon the

French throne showed a resolution to lead the way in all pageantry and revelry, and to keep up as long as possible the gladness and rejoicings of his people.

Such was the moment at which Bernard de Rohan and his companions rode through the long street of houses, gardens, churches, and monasteries, which then led through the suburb towards that gate of the city known by the name of the Porte Antoine. Every house had its decoration and its sign of festival; garlands were hanging over the door-posts, tapestries and silks spread out from the windows; the very convents and abbeys looked gay, and the bells in all the quarters of the town were ringing gaily. When the gate had been passed, however, and the dark towers of the Bastile left behind, an obstacle presented itself to the farther course of the horsemen in the shape of great barriers of wood drawn nearly across the street.

The party of travellers paused to examine what was the cause of this precaution, and saw an immense number of workmen busily engaged in marking out the centre of the street with posts and palings, covering them with silks and tapestries, and branches of laurels and other evergreens entwined; while, at a distance, appeared a high-raised platform, with a canopy ornamented with crimson and gold, and bearing embroidered upon the hangings a thousand fanciful devices, alluding, in quaint ways, to the restoration of peace, and to the friendly union of France, Spain, and Savoy.

At one side of this enclosed space, which formed, in fact, the lists for the approaching tournament, a sufficient space was left for two horsemen to ride abreast; and along this narrow alley Bernard de Rohan and his companions took their way, amongst crowds of people on foot assembled to witness the preparations, who greeted them with laughter and good-humoured jests, and vowed that they were knights come to break a lance in the sports of the succeeding days.

Making their way slowly onward, they at length approached the royal palace, called, in those days, the Tournelles, the King having given up his other dwelling at the Louvre to the ambassadors from Spain and various princely personages, who had lately arrived, together with a splendid train of full five hundred gentlemen of the first distinction.

The old palace of the Tournelles, which has now been demolished nearly two centuries and a half, was an immense and magnificent pile of Gothic building, nearly surrounded by magnificent gardens, occupying a large space in the city of Paris, very nearly opposite the well-known hotel of Saint

Paul, at the side of the Rue Saint Antoine. The whole of the Place Royale, and a vast number of the streets surrounding it—spots which themselves have since become famous in the ancient history of Paris—were then either covered with the vast buildings of the Tournelles, or enclosed within the walls of its gardens. Externally, it presented an immense mass of grey stone masonry, studded with a multitude of windows, and flanked at very short intervals by a number of small tall towers, each also full of windows and loopholes.

Such was the general aspect of the place; but the face of the building, which was usually somewhat stern and harsh, though majestic enough, was on the present occasion enlivened in an extraordinary manner by the flags, pennons, and banners that fluttered from every tower, and by the gay shields of arms which were suspended from the various windows.

Quite enough of the chivalrous spirit of the day existed in the bosom of Bernard de Rohan to make his heart beat high at the sight of such preparations, and a longing seized upon him to take a part in the exercises about to be performed. He well knew that few who would there appear were at all competent to meet him lance to lance, and he hoped, at all events, to obtain permission to share in what was to take place; but bitter disappointment, alas! awaited him. Monsieur de Nansé, according to the commands he had received, rode at once to the gates of the Tournelles, and caused his arrival to be reported to the King. Half-an-hour of expectation succeeded; and then that officer and his prisoner were summoned to the presence of Henry, who received them alone, but with a frowning brow.

"Monsieur de Nansé," he said, "at the best, your conduct has been very unwise and ill-judged. I trust that there is no reason for me to believe that these delays have been intentional."

The officer of the guard excused himself as best he might; but Henry, who was evidently in haste, soon interrupted him, waving his hand, and saying, "Enough, enough! sir.—Monsieur de Rohan, it is to you that I have principally to speak."

Bernard de Rohan thought the King's tone and manner was softened when he had turned to address him; and advancing gracefully, he bent the knee and kissed his sovereign's hand, saying, "I trust, sire, that I have your pardon for flying from the arm of the law, when I knew most perfectly my own innocence and the impossibility of proving it."

"Sir, I thank you for so doing," replied the King, "for

thereby you have spared me many a bitter regret. I have seen this morning the young Count de Brienne, and have heard all that he has to say. Your innocence and truth are beyond all doubt; and I have also to thank you for many services since rendered to my crown in Savoy. Most willing shall I be to show my gratitude to you, and to make you full reparation for what you have suffered, in such manner as a king may wisely and honourably do. But, alas! sir, there is one point in which I must still give you pain, and refuse you, probably, the boon that you are most anxious to demand. Hear me out! for I say this to prevent all needless application. In regard to your marriage with Mademoiselle de Brienne, I have taken an oath, such as no power on earth shall ever induce me to break. That you drew your sword upon the Count de Meyrand is incontestably proved; that you drew it the first is asserted——"

"But, sire," replied Bernard de Rohan, "I may now, I know, appeal to one who probably can satisfy your majesty."

"You mean the Dauphin," said the King. "Long ago, Monsieur de Rohan, he acted as became my son, and informed me of the whole particulars; but when pressed to the minute facts, he acknowledged that he could not say which first drew upon the other, having his back turned at the commencement of the affray."

Bernard de Rohan's head drooped, and he replied not a word. "I grieve for you, my friend," continued Henry, "I grieve for you much. I grieve for myself, that I am compelled to make one of my most noble and faithful subjects wish for my death! But to show you that I would not for worlds take any unjust means to change such a wish, I have this day solemnly promised Mademoiselle de Brienne, that she shall never be pressed either to choose another husband, or take the veil."

Still Bernard de Rohan replied not, but stood before the King, as if grief had turned him into stone. Henry, however, rose, adding, "Another day, De Rohan, you shall tell me what boon I can bestow upon you, but on this subject you must never touch more. On this subject, I am as inexorable as the grave."

Bernard de Rohan raised his head sadly, but firmly: "Sire," he said, "whatever be your decision, may you live long for the happiness and the blessing of your subjects! and may I be the only person amongst your people who can accuse you of injustice! In a former instance, when I was wrongfully condemned, you were, as you say you now will

be, inexorable to me. My truth and honour have since been fully re-established, beyond the possibility of doubt; and by that truth and honour I pledge myself that this last only remaining accusation against me is as false as the other: an accusation made by the darkest of criminals, and abetted by a convicted traitor. You do not indeed take from me life in this case, but you take from me hopes that I value more than life; and I must add, that if I have served your majesty—and to do so faithfully has always been my purpose—bitter have been the fruits of that service, and lamentable to me the result."

Henry's cheek had grown very red; and though he made an effort to govern his anger, yet it so seldom happens that the words of truth come straightforward upon a royal ear, that the reproach which burst from the agonized heart of Bernard de Rohan—however well deserved, and however much called for by the very act he was committing—seemed to the monarch the most daring insolence.

"Leave my presence, sir!" he said—"leave my presence! I esteem your services, regret your late sufferings, and pity your present disappointment sufficiently to forgive you the language you have used. But I must not suffer you to speak farther, lest grief should cause you to say things I cannot forgive. Leave, me, sir! I say, and without reply. You are free to come and go, whither you will; and I will take care that full justice be done in reversing the sentence which was mistakenly pronounced against you."

Bernard de Rohan bowed his head and withdrew. As he passed out of the palace, the preparations for the tournament again met his eye; but they now fell upon his sight as a matter in which he had no interest, as one of the many idle occupations of a world which had lost to him all zest and all attraction. For the time, hope, the light of life, was extinguished, and all was grey darkness in the same scenes which before had presented nothing but beauty and splendour.

CHAPTER XLVI.

It was the bright morning of a June day. The whole merry world of Paris was turned out, to display their holyday dresses on scaffoldings covered with every rich cloth, and ornamented with every fanciful device. Beauty and brightness shone

around; and all that was gay, and witty, and splendid in a nation famous for gaiety, wit, and splendour, was collected to witness that pageant which was intended to be the last splendid festival in honour of the marriage of Elizabeth of France with Philip of Spain, but which was destined in reality to be the last tournament held in Europe. Every spot which was not occupied by high princes and nobles was crowded by the populace of the capital; and though some discontent had been occasioned during the preceding days by the arrest of various distinguished Protestants, yet the people were now in high good humour, the more especially as the French knights had decidedly the advantage of the foreigners in those military exercises wherein all nations of Europe at that time took a pride.

At the head of the six challengers, whose shields ornamented the eastern end of the lists, was Henry the Second of France himself, who was still one of the most eminent of his court for all such sports and pastimes. The Maréchal de Vieilleville was another: but as it is not necessary here—after the manifold descriptions of tournaments and passes of arms that have been given elsewhere, and especially that surpassing description of the field of Ashby de la Zouch, which proceeded from the great master's pen—to dwell upon the manifold encounters that now took place, I shall notice none of the combatants except those whom I have named, and the persons whom they encountered.

The day had advanced some way; many courses had been run; and Henry himself had broken a lance with his brother-in-law, the Duke of Savoy, with infinite skill and grace, no eye being able to perceive that the shock of the lances had, in the slightest degree, shaken the monarch in the saddle. The Duke, however, had wavered considerably, and it was evident that Henry was pleased at his triumph. Each of the challengers was appointed to run three courses, and a fresh lance was delivered into Henry's hand, as the Duke of Guise presented himself at the opposite side of the lists. Again the trumpets sounded, and again the King ran his course with the same success. Both lances were shivered in a moment, and the air echoed and re-echoed with the shouts and applauses of the people, while many a beautiful lip from the balconies and galleries around exclaimed aloud, "Long live the King! Long live King Henry!"

Henry smiled and bowed, and raising the visor of his helmet, gazed around him, marking with a slight inclination of his head such members of the court as he knew more

intimately. Amongst the faces round, the fair, but now pale, countenance of Isabel de Brienne was to be seen, led thither by some vague hopes regarding the fate and fortune of him she loved.

Nor was he absent; for after a long conversation during the morning with the Maréchal de Vieilleville, he had stationed himself, when the lists opened, near the barrier by which the challengers entered. He was unarmed, indeed, except with the ordinary sword which every gentleman then wore as a part of his apparel; and his dress, though rich in materials, was accidentally—for he had not chosen it with any care—sad and sombre in colour.

The King had taken no notice of him as he rode in, and at the time did not seem to remark him; but the immediate glance with which the monarch's eye now wandered from the countenance of Isabel to that of her lover, showed that, in fact, Henry had seen him as he passed. As he thus turned, he smiled slightly upon the young nobleman; and while they were bringing him another lance, to run the last course, he bent his head towards the barrier, saying, "How is it you are not armed, Monsieur de Rohan? You should have been amongst our adversaries there."

"I had no heart, sire, to put on armour to-day," replied Bernard de Rohan; and before he could say more, the lance was given into the King's hand, and the young Count of Montgomery, the son of the Count de Lorges, presented himself as the King's last opponent.

Whether Henry was himself tired, or whether his horse was fatigued with the encounter, cannot be said, but certainly he did not sit so firmly as in the preceding course, and, in the shock of the lances, was bent considerably back in the saddle. In the meantime, the Maréchal de Vieilleville, who stood by the paling completely armed, and ready to succeed the King, beckoned to Bernard de Rohan, and spoke a few words to him over the barrier. The young cavalier immediately sprang over into the lists; and Vieilleville said, pointing to the King, who was at that very moment in full career towards Montgomery, with the whole trumpets sounding a charge, so that it was scarcely possible for any one to hear at a distance, "Now, De Rohan, now! Now is your time, or never; he is in high good humour at this moment with his success. He was somewhat moved by what I said last night. Speak to him whenever he returns: I will second you warmly, and in this joyful moment, perhaps we may succeed."

"God grant it!" replied Bernard de Rohan; "but I do

not think it. I feel a degree of despondency upon me, which makes me view everything in a dark light.—I dreamt last night that I had killed the King.—It was something which he said about my wishing for his death which, I know, was the occasion of such idle nonsense coming into my head; but still it has made me feel unhappy."

"I dreamt last night that I saw him dead," replied De Vieilleville, "and cannot get it out of my mind—but here he is coming back.—Now, De Rohan, now!"

Neither of the two had remarked accurately how the last course had gone. They saw, alone, that two lances had been shivered, and that the King kept his seat; but they had not seen the little mortification that he had undergone: neither could they tell what were his feelings by the expression of his countenance, for his visor was still down. Under these circumstances, the Maréchal and the young nobleman approached his stirrup as he rode up. The latter addressed a few words to the monarch which he did not appear to hear; and, raising his visor, Henry bent down his head, with a frowning brow and a reddened cheek, demanding somewhat sharply what was the boon he asked. De Vieilleville was coming up to support him in his petition—a petition which the reader may well divine; but the King's unhappy jester, whose malice was certainly far greater than his wit, and who, in other days, had caused a breach well nigh irreparable between Henry and his father, now interposed, as if to explain what Bernard de Rohan desired.

Whether he had been tutored by the friends of the Count de Meyrand, or spoke solely for the purpose of making mischief, cannot be told, but he said, "The noble Baron, my lord King, seeks only to unhorse you from your vow, as my cousin Montgomery had well nigh done just now from your beast's back. I think you are somewhat shaken in the saddle, Henry. Cannot you slip off over the horse's tail before the force of his petition, and let him win the day?"

"Get out of the way, fool!" cried Henry. "Now, sir, what is it that you want?" In the noise all round, I did not hear you."

"May it please you, sire," said Vieilleville, in his blunt but respectful manner, "he comes to ask, and I to second him in asking, that which, if you refuse, it can be but for the sole purpose of showing that once in your reign you refused justice to a subject. He beseeches your majesty, either at once to give him the hand of Mademoiselle de Brienne, or to proclaim a pardon to the Count of Meyrand, upon condition that

he comes back and does battle with him he has slandered, according to the law of arms. He thinks that, in this moment of joy and triumph, you will not refuse him."

"He thinks wrong," replied the King, "and you think wrong, too, De Vieilleville. I have not forgotten the business of Jarnac; so no more of such proposals to me: and then again for the other part of your demand—I answered this young man yesterday, and, moreover, I forbade him ever to mention this subject to me again. If I live till I am as broken with age as that broken truncheon," and he cast from him the remains of the lance he had lately held, "he shall not wed Isabel of Brienne till my dying day!—Let the lists be cleared. There are many persons within the barriers who have no business here. Herald, go to the Count of Montgomery, and tell him the King will break another lance with him."

"I beseech you, sire," said the Maréchal de Vieilleville, "do not think of doing so. You have run three courses with all honour. It is my turn to run as the next challenger; and I would have you remember that these exercises sometimes have dangerous consequences. I dreamed last night evil dreams of your majesty, and so did Monsieur de Rohan."

"Psha!" cried the King—"talk of auguries to the Queen. She deals in dreams and prognostications, not I. What were your dreams, De Vieilleville?"

"I dreamed that your majesty was dead," replied De Vieilleville, "and so did Monsieur de Rohan."

"Perhaps he wished it," said Henry, somewhat bitterly; "for until I be dead, my word is unchangeable."

"Oh, sire!" replied Bernard de Rohan, with a reproachful look.

"Well, well!" replied Henry, somewhat touched by the expression of the young nobleman's countenance—"there I believe I did you wrong."

"If, sire," replied Bernard de Rohan, "the best blood in this heart could give one year more of your life to the people that love you, I would shed it right willingly; and would to God you would now let me mount Monsieur de Vieilleville's horse, and in this silken jerkin, as I am, ride the next course instead of you; for I know not how it is, but my heart misgives me sadly."

"Nonsense, nonsense!" cried Henry.—"What says Montgomery, herald? Why has he dismounted?"

"Sire, he beseeches your majesty to pardon him," replied the herald; "but he says, his is not the next course, and the other gentlemen will take it ill if he runs out of his due turn."

"We will satisfy them!" replied the King—"we will satisfy them! Tell him perforce he must ride another course with me, for, by the Lord! he well nigh unhorsed me, and I must have my revenge."

The herald proceeded to execute the King's commands, and spoke to the Count of Montgomery at the other side of the lists, who thereupon turned round, as if apologizing to a gentleman near, who was just putting his foot in the stirrup. The young Count then mounted slowly, and evidently unwillingly. It seems as if every one, but the King himself, presaged some accident. Henry, however, sat calm and tranquil on his horse, chose a lance out of a number of stout staves that were brought to him, and as soon as he saw Montgomery ready, gave the signal for the trumpets to sound.

The trumpets did sound accordingly; but—whether it was, that the course was out of the usual order of the tournament, or that the many prognostications of evil which the astrologers and dreamers of dreams had been visited with, created a more than ordinary interest in this last course that the King was to run—not only was every head bent forward from windows, balconies, and barriers, but every lip was silent in expectation; and to the surprise of all, the trumpets and clarions suddenly ceased, after once sounding the charge, and instead of deafening the ear with loud and reiterated notes, as was customary, left a dead stillness over the whole field, through which was heard alone the galloping forward of the champions' horses.

They met in full career, and Henry, sitting his horse strongly, splintered his lance in a moment against the breast of Montgomery. The Count shivered his upon the shield of the King, and for a single instant the eyes of those who were so eagerly watching, thought that the course was ended, and the King secure: but, carried on by the fiery speed at which they had been going, the two horses rushed on after the shock; and at that moment it was remarked, that the Count of Montgomery had not cast away the truncheon of his splintered lance, but carried it still in the rest. Some of the gazers saw, and some did not see, that the staff of the broken lance struck the King on the helmet; but it seemed so slight a blow, even to those who remarked it, that no apprehensions were entertained, though the monarch wavered a little in the saddle.

A moment after, however, it was seen that he had let go his hold of the reins; and ere the horse, galloping on unrestrained, reached the opposite side of the lists, the King fell

forward on his neck, and had well nigh been cast to the ground.

The master of the horse, and the chief equerry, whose task it was to meet the King at the end of the course, and aid him to dismount, now sprang forward; and while the one seized the bridle, the other caught the monarch in his arms. It was then seen that blood was dropping through the bars of his helmet, and he exclaimed, in a faint voice, "Take off the casque! take off the casque! Ah, cursed course! If I had listened to Vieilleville, this would not have happened! I feel that I am a dead man!"

They hastened to remove his head-piece as he commanded, and then indeed a terrible sight presented itself; for the splintered end of the lance had struck him in the right eye, which it had utterly destroyed, and entered apparently some way into the brain. He had not lost all his strength, however, nor had his intellect as yet been affected. "Where is De Vieilleville?" he said—"where is De Vieilleville?"

"Here, sire," said the Maréchal de Vieilleville, who, the moment the accident had happened, had hurried across the lists with Bernard de Rohan,—"here, sire. I hope your majesty is not much hurt."

"To the death, Vieilleville! to the death!" replied Henry. "Would that I had taken your advice! But one cannot avoid one's destiny.—Take me to my chamber, my good friend: I make you superintendent thereof. Let no one enter on any pretence but the surgeons. No, not one; for I feel my mind begin to wander, and no one must see me thus. Ah! Monsieur de Rohan, if you wished me dead, you are now satisfied!"

Thus speaking, he was led away by De Vieilleville and the master of the horse, taking advantage of their support, apparently more on account of the agony he suffered, than from loss of strength in consequence of his wound.

Bernard de Rohan gazed after him with a deep sigh, and was then turning to the part of the lists where Isabel de Brienne sat. He had seen her for a short time the night before, and they had parted with feelings akin to despair. Now, however, he might, indeed, bear to her a renewal of hope; but that hope, he felt, must be shadowed by grief for his King, and dark apprehensions for his native land, that it could scarcely afford any comfort to her or to himself. Ere he had half crossed the open space, however, a group of three or four persons, consisting of officers of the court, who

had been conversing eagerly together after the King was led away, followed the young cavalier at a quick pace, and came somewhat closer to him than seemed necessary. As all was by this time confusion and dismay, he took no notice, but was walking on, when he was suddenly seized by both arms, and one of the gentlemen, whom he did not know, told him he was a prisoner.

"The King's words, Monsieur de Rohan, were too significant to be mistaken," he said. "We cannot suffer you to quit this place till the matter has been reported to the prévôt, and his opinion taken."

"Let it be quickly, sir," said Bernard de Rohan. "The King's words bore a very different signification from that which you attribute to them, as Monsieur de Vieilleville can explain to you at once."

"We have already sent to the prévôt," said the gentleman, "and here comes our messenger back again."

"Well, sir, what says the prévôt?" said Bernard de Rohan, as another officer came up. "Application had better at once be made to Monsieur de Vieilleville."

"Monsieur de Vieilleville is shut up in the King's chamber," replied the officer, "and no one is admitted except the surgeons. The reply of the prévôt is, that Monsieur de Rohan must be kept under arrest in the Châtelet till the King's words are properly explained."

In half-an-hour more, Bernard de Rohan found himself once more a prisoner in the tower of the Châtelet. The governor grinned as he received him; and though he was not now put in one of the lower dungeons, every other sort of severity was exercised upon him, on the pretence of insuring against his escape. Bernard de Rohan, however, bore the whole lightly, perfectly certain that sooner or later this new difficulty would vanish from his path. His grief for the King, indeed, was deep and sincere; and as every sort of information was refused him regarding Henry's state, he was left in all the pain of uncertainty. On the third day of his imprisonment, some sounds of lamentation and prayer reached his ear, as if rising from the court below; and about half-an-hour after, just as night was falling, the governor told him, with a meaning smile, that the noise he had heard was occasioned by the execution of two wretched men* who had been decapitated that afternoon, in consequence of an order

* This execution was probably that of two men, whose heads were struck off in the court of the Châtelet, for the purpose of giving the surgeons of Henry the Second an opportunity of examining anatomically the seat of his wound.

from the palace. Although these tidings did not produce such apprehensions in regard to his own fate as the governor expected, yet it saddened him much, for the thought suggested by such acts were all painful to a kind and feeling heart like his.

He sat up pondering these things till nearly midnight, when suddenly the great bell of the gate was heard to ring; and, shortly after, he could distinguish various steps ascending the stairs. The bars were cast down, the door was unlocked, and the governor appeared, followed by two officers of the prévôt. They seemed surprised to find him up, but informed him that he was to be conducted immediately to the palace of the Tournelles.

To the governor Bernard de Rohan would not apply for information of any kind; and the prévôt's officers, though extremely civil, could afford him none. The order they had received, they said, appeared to emanate from the grand master; and having set off instantly, they had not even heard a report of what was the ulterior object of sending for the prisoner to the palace.

The young cavalier, however, made no delay; and though the distance was considerable, he soon reached the spot where the Tournelles rose in one large dark mass, at the side of the Rue de Saint Antoine, bearing, in the calm solemn moonlight, a very different aspect from that which it had displayed when last he beheld it. It was now the abode of mourning and grief; and as Bernard de Rohan was led along through many a wide hall and long corridor, no sound met his ears, in a place usually so full of gaiety and mirth. He was at length conducted into a small tapestried chamber, where an usher sat reading by a solitary lamp. The moment the man saw him he started up, and said, "Wait for one moment, sir, and I will announce that you are here. You may go," he added, speaking to the two officers; "you will not be wanted any more."

The two men obeyed at once, and Bernard de Rohan was left alone for a few minutes. At length the usher returned, and merely saying in a low tone, "Follow me, sir," he led the way onward, with a noiseless foot, to a small antechamber, where two or three of the royal servants were standing in silence on either side. Upon a table in the midst appeared many drugs and some surgical instruments;* and the awful

* In the famous collection called "*les quarante tableaux*," which contains a representation of the chamber of Henry II. at his death, this table is placed in the bed-room.

stillness was only broken by a faint voice speaking in the room beyond.

To the door of that room the usher now led him, and opened it gently, saying, in a low tone, "You are to go in, sir."

Bernard de Rohan entered accordingly, and found himself in the death-chamber of Henry the Second. There were two or three persons standing round the rich carved bed at the farther side of the room, amongst whom the young cavalier distinguished—though there was no light but that which proceeded from a shaded lamp—the forms of a priest and Monsieur de Vieilleville. The latter, on seeing some one enter, came forward with a noiseless step, and took De Rohan's hand. "The King has recovered his senses," he said, in a whisper; "and having seen the Queen and the Dauphin, with whom he is now speaking, ordered you to be sent for."

"I rejoice to hear he is better," replied the young cavalier.

But Vieilleville shook his head with a melancholy gesture. "It is death, De Rohan," he said—"it is death, not recovery, that gives him back his reason. Come quietly up to his bedside, and I will mention your name in a moment."

Bernard de Rohan followed him with a noiseless step to the bed, where, pale and haggard, with his head covered with bandages, lay the once gay and powerful Henry the Second. As they advanced, the figure of the Dauphin flitted past from the other side; but the priest remained by the King's pillow, and the surgeon stood at the foot of the couch.

"Here is Monsieur de Rohan, sire," said De Vieilleville, in a low tone.

"Ha!" said the King, turning uneasily in his bed,—"ha! I am glad you are come. You have accused me of injustice, Monsieur de Rohan; and, perhaps, I have been harsh towards you. Harsh, but not willingly unjust. However, I cannot make a clear breast without asking your forgiveness——"

"And doing what you can to atone for all the gentleman has suffered," said the priest.

"Well, I will atone, too," said the King. "There is but one thing, De Rohan, which I can give, that you hold to be worth having. It shall be yours, notwithstanding all——"

Bernard de Rohan knelt down by the King's bedside, and kissed his burning hand. "Speak not of it now, sire," he said; "nor say one word that can trouble or agitate you at the present moment. Be assured that I have ever loved you; that I love you still; and that if I could restore you to health, my own life would be but a poor sacrifice."

"Ah! there you make it worse," said the King, "by speaking such affection, when I have not deserved it. However, you forgive me. Is it not so?"

"If there be aught to be forgiven, sire," replied de Rohan, "I do forgive it from my very heart."

"Then go to my son Francis," said the King. "He will be soon King of France. A young and inexperienced one, alas! Uphold him with your sword, De Rohan, and with your counsel. Go to him, De Rohan. He knows my will regarding you, and will prize you highly."

Bernard de Rohan once more kissed the King's hand, and silently quitted the room. As he passed through the antechamber, one of the servants stepped forward, saying, "The King Dauphin"—so Francis was called after his marriage with the beautiful Mary Queen of Scots—"the King Dauphin, sir, has ordered me to conduct you to him. He is now in the Green Hall."

Bernard de Rohan merely motioned with his hand to lead on, and followed; and at the other end of the building he was led into a large room covered with green tapestry, and but dimly lighted. The prince, who was soon to receive the crown of that great empire, was leaning on the table, speaking low, but earnestly, to the fair young being who had lately become his bride. Behind her stood a lady of the middle age; but on her left hand was one, the sight of whom, though her face was shaded from the light, caused Bernard de Rohan's heart to beat high.

"Ah, De Rohan!" said the Dauphin, turning round to greet him, "this is a terrible hour in which we meet once more. However, my father has commissioned me to do this." And, taking the hand of Isabel de Brienne, he placed it in that of her lover, never to be separated from it again.

We need say but little more. In the table of contents attached to an old book, the greater part of which is not to be met with, I find these words, which probably give us a brief account of the farther history of one of our characters:—

> "Meyrand, the Count of, abandons the service of France—goes over to the enemy with his company—grief and shame of his friends—his miserable death."

The pages to which these heads refer are marked down carefully; but, as those pages are now lost for ever, we can give no farther information on that point.

It only remains to be said, that some years after the period of which we have just been writing, there might be found, not

far from the frontiers of Savoy, a fine old hall in one of the castles of the time, wherein sported a group of beautiful children round an old man dressed in the ecclesiastical habit, who amused them, even then, with many a quip, and sally, and gay jest and trick, though age had cast winter upon his brow, and dimmed the brightness of his eye.

A renowned warrior, and a lady still in the brightness of her beauty, sat at the head of the hospitable table which that hall daily displayed; and on the right hand of that lady, each day, appeared the good old almoner we have mentioned; while still, before the carvers began to do their duty, she turned round with a kindly smile, and asked Father Willand to bless the meat.

THE END.

T. C. Savill, Printer, 4, Chandos Street, Covent Garden.

L 005 277 947 7

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
AA 000 369 863 6